

**Marxist Rebellion in the Age of Neo-Liberal Globalization:**  
**FARC and the Naxalite-Maoists in Comparison**

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## **Abstract**

Despite the general academic consensus that liberal democracy has triumphed over communism, Marxist-inspired movements continue to thrive across the global south. This is a curious phenomenon in the post-Cold War era. This paper explores the recent growth of both The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency in India, and compares the two groups. It analyzes the factors that have led to their resurgence, in particular, the political and economic dimensions. Specifically, it addresses the impact of two dominant factors in fomenting their resurgence: neo-liberalism and political exclusion. First, recent growth of both groups seems to correlate with the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies and progressively draconian structural adjustments, which aggravated existing poverty and inequality, in their respective countries. Second, recent growth of both groups seems to correlate with political exclusion of marginalized groups, an exclusion increasingly enforced by state violence. The survival and growth of Marxist-inspired armed movements across the globe also raises important questions about the future of liberal democracy. This paper asks whether the persistence of Marxist-inspired movements across the global south has given the lie to the "end of history" theory, and what their resurgence says, if anything, about the "clash of civilizations theory. It concludes that the success of these movements challenges the apparent triumph of liberal democracy in both Colombia and India, and perhaps in the post-Cold War era globally.

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Many thanks also to my supervisor, Kalowatie Deonandan, for her warm encouragement, endless patience and peerless fashion advice.

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Paul and Karin Jordan, without whose support and encouragement it would not have been possible.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In 1991, the Soviet Union finally collapsed, bringing to an end decades of conflict between liberal democracy in the West and communist regimes in the East. This was a war fought not just on the battlefield, but also in the halls of academia and in the public imagination. These early years were heady times, when countries across the globe bowed to the inevitability of capitalism and adopted neo-liberal economic reforms alongside democratization. The future seemed bright and many came to believe that we were witnessing the end of mankind's ideological evolution, or "the end of history."

However, one need only look to the global south to realize that reports of the death of Marxism may be exaggerated. Across the Third World, Marxist and Maoist-inspired movements have been flourishing since the end of the Cold War, from the Zapatistas in Mexico to the Bolivarian Alliance in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Cuba, to Nepal, where competing communist parties – including a former Maoist rebel group – have dominated the legislature and executive in the post-monarchy era. Marxist guerrilla armies also continue to operate around the world, including the Kurdistan Worker's Party in Turkey, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP) and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in India. And, lest one think that these seemingly anachronistic groups are marginal and increasingly irrelevant, many of these insurgencies are actually *increasing* in membership, in territory, and in military effectiveness.<sup>1</sup>

The subjects of this paper, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency, have both seen a particularly strong resurgence in the post-Cold War era. FARC's membership is estimated as high as 18 000 combatants and as recently as 2008 was reported to control about 40 percent of Colombian territory.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the Naxalite insurgency now controls at least 92 000 square kilometers in eastern India, has an influential presence in about

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<sup>1</sup> Walker and Grey, *Historical Dictionary*, xxxv.

<sup>2</sup> Walker and Grey, *Historical Dictionary*, xxxv; James J. Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia: A Revolutionary Exception in an Age of Imperialist Expansion," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 57 (2005): 20-33; James J. Brittain, "The Continuity of FARC-EP Resistance in Colombia," *Counterpunch* 1 Aug 2008.

one third of the country, and has an armed wing that is 20 000 strong, with a further 40 000 full-time cadres.<sup>3</sup> In both cases, these groups have become so entrenched that the guerillas have assumed many government functions, including running schools, building roads, and administering courts of law.<sup>4</sup>

So, despite the general academic and public consensus that liberal democracy has triumphed over communism, it appears that across the global south, Marxist-inspired movements continue to thrive. This is a curious circumstance, and it is surely worth investigating why this phenomenon is a feature of the post-Cold War era.

## **1.1 Definitions**

Throughout this paper, the term “liberal democracy” refers to those forms of government in which representative democracy operates under the principles of liberalism, that is, the rights of the individual are broadly protected and enshrined in law. Liberal democracy is characterized, at least ostensibly, by fair, free, and competitive elections between multiple distinct political parties, the separation of powers into different branches of government, rule of law, and the equal protection of human rights and civil liberties for all people. Liberal democracies often draw on a written or unwritten constitution to define and limit the powers of government.

This understanding of liberal democracy is far from controversial. However, in the view of this author, liberal democracy has in practice an economic component. Liberal democracies are often assumed to operate alongside and in concert with a capitalist economy. Indeed, capitalism has some ideological resonance with the principles of liberalism, which privileges the rights of the individual (including an individual’s property rights). Liberal democracy may therefore be distinguished from “social democracy”, in which a democratic political system operates alongside a socialist or command economy. (Alternatively, the term social democracy may describe policy regimes wherein a universal welfare state and collective bargaining schemes operate within a capitalist economy, especially when referring to the models prominent in Western

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<sup>3</sup> Arundhati Roy, “Walking with the Comrades,” *Outlook India*, 29 March 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.



and Northern Europe during the later half of the 20th century). This paper takes the position that it is practically difficult, if not impossible, to separate liberal democracy from the capitalist context within which it operates. In the post-Cold War era, that capitalism is of a particularly radical, neo-liberal flavor.

The term “neo-liberalism”, as it is currently used, was introduced in the 1980s in connection with Augusto Pinochet’s economic reforms in Chile. Those reforms were largely planned and directed by economists at the University of Chicago, including such leading thinkers as Milton Friedman.<sup>5</sup> Neo-liberalism is a current form of economic liberalism that draws on neoclassical economic theory and advocates economic liberalization, privatization, free trade, open markets, deregulation, reductions in government spending, and a greater role for the private sector in the economy. The term is widely used to denote a rather radical version of *laissez-faire* capitalism, and is sometimes used derogatively by opponents of market reforms. While the shift to neo-liberalism in the post-Cold War period has not been universal or monolithic, it is nevertheless global and nearly ubiquitous. And, while not all liberal democratic states have experienced the neo-liberal shift in the same way, even countries with a strong social democratic tradition have moved to the right since the end of the Cold War (including Canada and Northern European states). This process has been especially pronounced since the financial crisis of 2008, which prompted the introduction of austerity measures across Europe.

## **1.2 Focus, Objectives and Research Questions**

This thesis focuses on the recent resurgence of both The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in India, and compares the two groups. It analyzes the factors that have led to their resurgence, and determines whether they are similar in both cases. In particular, this thesis focuses on the political and economic dimensions of the resurgence. Specifically, it

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<sup>5</sup> Milton Friedman was a leading neo-liberal thinker, and his work proved enormously influential in both academic and policy circles. For more information, see e.g. Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom: 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) and Milton Friedman and Anna Jacobson Schwartz, *A Monetary History of the United States 1867-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

addresses the impact of two dominant factors and their roles in fomenting the resurgence: neo-liberalism and political exclusion. First, the recent resurgence of both groups seems to correlate with the adoption of neo-liberal economic policies and progressively draconian structural adjustments, which aggravated existing poverty and inequality. Second, the recent resurgence of both groups seems to correlate with the increasing political exclusion of marginalized groups, enforced both by the implementation of anti-democratic laws, and by state violence.

The survival and resurgence of Marxist-inspired armed movements across the globe raises important questions about the future of liberal democracy. Has the persistence of Marxist-inspired movements across the global south given the lie to the "end of history" theory? What does their resurgence say, if anything, about the "clash of civilizations theory? What will the future hold for these groups and for their respective countries? Each of these important questions can be explored through a comparison of FARC in Colombia and the Naxalite insurgency in India. This research also contributes to literature in the field, since these two case studies have not been compared before.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Data for this thesis has been compiled from multiple sources, including both quantitative and qualitative data from primary and secondary sources. However, this research emphasizes qualitative data. Quantitative data is limited to economic and development indicators for both Colombia and India, including data published by the United Nations, World Bank, and organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Most of the data relied upon is qualitative, including secondary sources such as books and journal articles, and primary sources including media reports, press interviews, autobiographies and materials published by both insurgent groups.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union, academics and public figures scrambled to find – perhaps invent – the defining paradigm of the post-Cold War era. The earliest theory to fill the void was the "end of history" thesis, which posited that with the triumph of liberal democracy, we had witnessed the end of mankind's ideological evolution and ideological conflict. The most famous proponent of this theory is Francis Fukuyama, who in 1992 published *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama argued that Marxism was defeated, discredited and "totally exhausted."<sup>6</sup> Most academics agreed that Marxism as an ideology was in terminal crisis, the destruction of the Soviet Union had marked its death, and it was time to "return Marx to the nineteenth century where he belongs."<sup>7</sup>

Soon after, however, others began to propose that the post-Cold War era would be defined by conflict as before, except that rather than being driven by political or economic ideology, this conflict would be cultural and religious in nature. Conflict would henceforth occur between "civilizations" with fundamentally opposing values. In 1992, Benjamin Barber published "Jihad vs. McWorld", in which he examined fault lines between liberal democracy and traditional religious, cultural and ethnic values.<sup>8</sup> Also published in 1992 was Samuel Huntington's infamous *Clash of Civilizations*, which argued that cultural and religious identities would be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War era.<sup>9</sup> In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks the paradigm of eternal cultural conflict, particularly between fundamentalist Islam and "the West", has become received wisdom.

While fundamentalist Islam certainly presents an ideological challenge to liberal democracy – one that has significant currency throughout much of the world – many scholars are nevertheless highly critical of the "clash of civilizations"

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<sup>6</sup> Walker and Grey, *Historical Dictionary*, xxxiv.

<sup>7</sup> Walker and Grey, *Historical Dictionary*, xxxiv.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

theory, and rightly so. In *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen criticized Huntington's portrayal of monolithic "civilizations" and the failure to recognize the diversity of identities both within those civilizations and within each individual member.<sup>10</sup> Edward Said was also strongly critical of the idea of "fixed civilizations" and of the notion that races of people have disparate psychologies and destinies. In "The Clash of Ignorance," Said argued that this was an "imagined geography" that amounted to a theoretical legitimization of American wars of aggression, and would prove to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of this widespread criticism of its concepts, methodology and implications, and lack of empirical evidence, the "clash of civilizations" theory has remained influential, especially in American policy circles.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, despite the apparent flaws of the "clash of civilizations" theory, Fukuyama's "end of history" theory seems premature by comparison. Aside from the implicit criticisms of Huntington and Berber, there are many other critics. Azar Gat, for example, argued in "The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers" that China and Russia, operating as authoritarian capitalist regimes, present a viable rival model to liberal democracy.<sup>13</sup> Hugo Chavez also argued against the theory (which he called "American hegemonic pretensions") and in favor of his own philosophy of Bolivarianism, which extolls economic sovereignty and self-sufficiency, grassroots political participation and more equitable distribution of wealth.<sup>14</sup> Marxists, environmentalists and anarchists are, of course, also highly critical.<sup>15</sup>

The liberal-democratic apotheosis is also under siege in the real world by governments and global movements seemingly allied against the destined end of history. In "The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion", Thomas Carothers documents a rising tide of governments that have denounced democracy promotion as political meddling and American interventionism. Russia and a handful of post-Soviet states, China, Venezuela, Nepal and others, have denounced Western "pro-

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<sup>10</sup> Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: Norton, 2006), xi-xiv.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Said, "The Clash of Ignorance", *Nation* 273 (2001): 11-13.

<sup>12</sup> Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 2004), 15-21.

<sup>13</sup> Azar Gat, "The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (2007): 51.

<sup>14</sup> Hugo Chavez, "Address to the United Nations" 20 September 2006, *CommonDreams.org*. <http://www.commondreams.org/views06/0920-22.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Miliband, "Fukuyama and the Socialist Alternative," *New Left Review* 193 (1992).

democracy” NGOs as threats to their sovereignty and have had them expelled or tightly controlled.<sup>16</sup> The neo-liberal shift triggered by the triumph of liberal democracy is also under attack from the ill-named "anti-globalization movement", a diverse collection of labour organizations, landless peoples' and peasants' movements, anti-poverty and human rights groups. This loose network of activists has for decades opposed neo-liberal policies and attracted widespread, if lukewarm, public sympathy. Prominent academics, writers, activists and economists are allied to the cause, including Noam Chomsky, Arundhati Roy, Naomi Klein, Vandana Shiva and Joseph Stiglitz.<sup>17</sup> The critics have only become louder in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Such a fierce rejection of liberal democracy by its own intelligentsia, deep in the democratic heartland, is surely a curious development in the wake of the final defeat of communism.

However, while fighting words have been hurled back and forth over Fukuyama's prophecy of the end of history, virtually no ink has been spilled questioning the foundational assumption of his theory: that Marxism is dead and Reagan killed it. As early as 1993, the eminent philosopher Jacques Derrida questioned this assumption and its durability. In *Specters of Marx*, he argued that with the fall of the Soviet Union, Marx's philosophy and radical critiques (though not communism itself) had become more relevant than ever.<sup>18</sup> Derrida remarked on the West's smug self-satisfaction, and was especially critical of Fukuyama's evangelism of liberal democracy, writing:

...never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history...let us never neglect this obvious macroscopic fact... never before, in absolute

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<sup>16</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs* 85 (2006): 55-68.

<sup>17</sup> Noam Chomsky, "Globalization Marches On," *In These Times* 26 Mar 2010; and Arundhati Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*, (Toronto: Penguin, 2009); and Naomi Klein, "Reclaiming the Commons," *New Left Review* 9 (2001); and Vandana Shiva, *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* (London: Zed Books, 2006); and Joseph Stiglitz, *Globalization and its Discontents* (London: W.W. Norton, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Trans by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 1994), 85.

figures, have so many men, women and children been subjugated, starved or exterminated on the earth.<sup>19</sup>

For Derrida, Fukuyama's *End of History and the Last Man* served as an intellectual fig leaf for Western hegemony and for the "new gospel" of liberal democracy, while Fukuyama's newfound celebrity was merely a symptom of the rush to declare Marx dead. Derrida also called for the creation of a "New International", an informal alliance of people and institutions inspired by Marxism, so as to renew and radicalize Marxist criticism.<sup>20</sup>

Derrida's critique of the "end of history" theory and his call for the creation of a global "new-left" is particularly salient because it predicts the rise of the anti-globalization movement, and even dares to suggest that Marxist philosophy and radical Marxist groups could survive in the post-Cold War era. Marxist and Maoist-inspired movements have indeed expanded in the global south, including armed movements.<sup>21</sup> The subjects of this paper, FARC in Colombia and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in India – both classic Marxist and Maoist revolutionary groups with their origins in the 1960s – are actually *growing* in membership, territory and influence, despite the virtual academic consensus that they are doomed to the dustbin of history.

Colombia and India are both regarded by Western states, including the United States and Canada, as examples of liberal democratic government<sup>22</sup> and both have aggressively pursued neo-liberal economic policies since the early 1990s. The growth of armed Marxist-inspired rebel groups within their borders, however, raises uncomfortable questions about the future of liberal democracy in those countries. It challenges the end of history theory, since FARC guerillas and Naxalite insurgents feel both un-served by existing democratic institutions and

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<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> Walker and Grey, *Historical Dictionary*, xxxv.

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Sheldon Oliver, "Canadian Free Trade Report Ignores Human Rights Abuses in Colombia: Amnesty International" *Colombia Reports* 23 May 2014. <http://colombiareports.co/canadian-free-trade-report-ignores-human-rights-abuses-colombia-amnesty-international/>. Both the United States and Canada consider Colombia a close ally and valuable trade partner. (The Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCOFTA) went into effect in 2011.) Despite persistent government corruption and widespread human rights violations connected to the narco-state, successive Colombian regimes have been lauded as positive examples of liberal democracy by Western governments.

victimized by neo-liberal economic reforms. It also challenges the clash of civilizations theory, since these are culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse groups united by shared political and economic goals. So, what does this phenomenon mean for liberal democracy in the age of neo-liberal globalization?

## **CHAPTER 3: THE REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA**

### **3.1 History Until 1990**

After a long struggle plagued by set-backs and military defeats, Colombia finally gained independence from Spain in 1821 as part of Gran Colombia, a union of liberated Venezuela, Colombia, Panama and Ecuador. The great hero of the war, Simon Bolivar, ruled as its first president from the capital Bogota. While Bolivar desired a strong, centralist authority in Gran Colombia, federalists urged dissolution and more democratic governance. Soon after Bolivar's death, Colombia did separate and a prominent federalist, Francisco de Paula Santander, became its next president. Santander built Colombia's first legal framework and system of finance, founded schools, and challenged the influence of the church in education and public life. His allies became known as "liberals", in opposition to the centralists, clergy and religious laity, who identified as "conservatives".<sup>23</sup> Over the next century, Colombian politics and society were dominated by the Conservative and Liberal parties, each representing different factions of the same wealthy and connected national elite. During this period, Liberal and Conservative supporters fought a series of extremely violent civil wars. Party loyalty remained one of the principal anchors of Colombian identity for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup>

Colombia in the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by an economic and political context similar to that of today. Colombia experienced a phase of economic modernization and integration into the global economy, driven by a booming export market for coffee and growing American investment. However, the benefits of economic growth were distributed highly unequally, and poverty indicators actually worsened during this period. Three percent of landholders owned more than half of Colombia's agricultural land and by the early 1940s Colombia's gini coefficient had risen from 0.45 to 0.53, indicating a significant increase in maldistribution of wealth.<sup>25</sup> During this period, the popularization of socialist ideas was also changing the political landscape, and Colombia's agricultural and urban

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<sup>23</sup> Geoff Simmons, *Colombia: A Brutal History* (London: SAQI, 2004), 23-25.

<sup>24</sup> James Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries in Latin America* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2003), 90.

<sup>25</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 92-95.



workforces began to radicalize. The 1920s in particular saw a number of strikes by urban workers and land invasions by peasant organizations.<sup>26</sup> Looking back, scholars have attributed this radicalization to "accentuated economic inequality and obvious political fraud."<sup>27</sup>

Also throughout this time, hostility between the Liberal and Conservative parties continued to mount. After over a decade out of power, the Conservative Party retook the presidency in 1946. The Liberal Party split into two factions. The Leftist faction was led by Jorge Gaitán, an extremely popular figure who criticized economic inequality and concentration of political power. In 1948, Gaitán was assassinated in the streets of Bogotá, sparking a 10-year civil war between Liberal and Conservative supporters. *La Violencia*, as it was known, saw between 100 000 and 300 000 political murders, and stands out as the bloodiest period in Colombia's remarkably violent history.<sup>28</sup>

Colombia's first guerrilla groups emerged organically out of self-defense organizations (*cuadrillas*) established by Liberal Party supporters during *La Violencia*.<sup>29</sup> These roaming, loosely organized groups were established by ordinary citizens to protect their neighborhoods and villages from violence meted out by the governing Conservative Party.<sup>30</sup> Many were well provisioned, and may have been financed by the National Liberal Executive and wealthy Liberal individuals. The guerilla movement was especially influential in the eastern plains, where Liberal guerrillas controlled vast swaths of territory. Meanwhile, in the central departments such as Tolima and Cundinamarca, a nascent *communist* guerrilla movement was emerging.<sup>31</sup>

In 1953, General Rojas Pinilla assumed power in a coup d'état. Pinilla's promises of peace, and economic and political change, led Liberal guerrilla factions

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land: Diary of a Limpieza in Colombia* (New York: New Press, 2003), 191-196.

<sup>27</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 92-95.

<sup>28</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 94-96.

<sup>29</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, 191-196.

<sup>30</sup> Rony Pshisva and Gustavo Suarez, "Captive Markets: The Impact of Kidnappings on Corporate Investment in Colombia," Finance and Economics Discussion Series: Divisions of Research and Statistics and Monetary Affairs, Federal Reserve Board, Washington D.C. February 2006: 6.

<sup>31</sup> *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, Toronto: International Commission of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army, 1999: 10-12.

to demobilize. Only communist guerrilla groups were unconvinced by Pinilla's promises and remained in the field. (Former Liberal guerrillas were later targeted for assassination.)<sup>32</sup> Consequently, by 1955 Colombia's guerrilla movement had radicalized and was effectively dominated by communists.<sup>33</sup>

*La Violencia* ended in 1958 with the formation of the National Front, a coalition government in which Liberals and Conservatives shared congressional seats equally and alternated the presidency every four years. While it finally put an end to civil war, the National Front also entrenched the power of Colombia's ruling elite. The coalition allowed Liberals and Conservatives to work together to exclude other segments of Colombian society from the political process, including the emergent middle class, the political Left and, especially, impoverished peasants and urban workers. To this end, a wave of state repression was unleashed on labour unions, student groups and peasant organizations throughout the 1960s.<sup>34</sup>

The National Front also presided over staggering levels of poverty and inequality. A 1950 World Bank report<sup>35</sup> on Colombia noted high rates of infant mortality, illiteracy and overcrowding, as well as a lack of public services and credit, and low energy consumption. Agricultural workers, who accounted for slightly more than half of the active labour force, were particularly impoverished, suffering from extremely low incomes and poor nutrition. The World Bank report emphasized that despite economic growth, improvement of development indicators was lower than expected.<sup>36</sup> These economic and political conditions – political exclusion and increasing poverty – were driving factors in the survival and growth of the communist guerrilla movement in its early years.

Indeed, the marriage of the Liberal and Conservative parties and their failure to enact any significant land reform, coupled with the outlawing of the Communist Party, contributed to a sense amongst many marginalized groups that the communist

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<sup>32</sup> *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 10-12.

<sup>33</sup> *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 10-12.

<sup>34</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 94-96.

<sup>35</sup> World Bank, 1950 *Appendix*, Vol. 3 of *The basis of a development program for Colombia*, Washington, DC: World Bank in Frank Safford and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 306-307.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank 1950 *The basis of a development program for Colombia* in Safford and Palacios, *Colombia*, 306-307.

guerrilla movement was the only credible political alternative in Colombia. The guerrillas called for more equitable land distribution, the nationalization of strategic industries and, naturally, for "breaking the yoke of imperialist domination."<sup>37</sup> The movement was based in the southwestern departments of Tolima, Cauca and Huila, and counted tens of thousands of supporters among the rural peasantry. Despite a vicious counter-insurgency campaign, the guerrillas settled into remote rural areas and continued to repulse advances by the Colombian army.<sup>38</sup>

In 1964, FARC was formally established as the official armed wing of the Colombian Communist Party. It was initially composed of a group of 48 men under the leadership of Manuel Marulanda Vélez, a former liberal guerrilla.<sup>39</sup> That same year, senators, party leaders and the military high command began to stir up public hysteria against "independent republics", those areas of the country still controlled by the fragmented guerrilla movement. In May, President Guillermo León Valencia inaugurated Operation Marquetalia as part of Plan LASO (Latin American Security Operation) – the largest military operation yet carried out in Colombia – to eliminate the guerrilla threat.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the government's best efforts, however, FARC survived and continued to grow. In July, in the midst of fighting in Marquetalia, FARC proclaimed the Agrarian Program, the centerpiece of its political platform.<sup>41</sup> In these early days, FARC's social base was composed of peasants and settlers (*colonos*), particularly in the south and in western Amazonia. FARC developed strong ties with rural communities by protecting their land from appropriation by large landowners, and by

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<sup>37</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 14.

<sup>39</sup> Duncan Green, "A Trip to the Market: the impact of neoliberalism in Latin America," *Developments in Latin American Political Economy: States, Markets and Actors* ed. Julia Buxton and Nicola Phillips (Vancouver: Manchester University Press, 1999), 116. For more information on Manuel Marulanda see e.g. *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 13. Manuel Marulanda Vélez, born Pedro Antonio Marín, was targeted during La Violencia for his Liberal affiliations and fled into the mountains in his native region of Quindío in 1948. After several months in hiding, he and 14 cousins organized themselves into a guerrilla unit and marched to southern Tolima to join other Liberal guerrillas. He later became a communist and changed his name to honour a murdered working class activist. Between 1953 and 1957, he and Jacobo Prías Alape organized new mass peasants' movements in Riochiquito and Marquetalia.

<sup>40</sup> *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 18.

compelling landlords to pay labourers fair wages.<sup>42</sup> Although it remained but one of many leftist guerrilla groups in the country, FARC became, by far, the largest professional guerrilla force in Colombia.<sup>43</sup>

In the early 1980s, the Colombian public called for the government to negotiate peace with the guerrillas. Negotiations were opened by Conservative President Belisario Betancur Cuartas and were initially successful, achieving an agreement in principle from FARC and other groups to renounce violence and enter democratic politics.<sup>44</sup> Following the 1984 peace agreement, FARC was invited to participate in upcoming Congressional elections. Under the direction of the Communist Party, FARC established its own political wing, the Unión Patriótica (UP) party, and campaigned in the election.<sup>45</sup>

However, UP members were quickly targeted by paramilitary death squads allied with the government. In the run-up to the 1986 elections, as many as 4 000 UP leaders, members and supporters were assassinated. Despite winning fourteen Congressional seats, this decimation of the civilian leadership destroyed the Communist Party in Colombia and ended FARC's brief turn to legitimate politics.<sup>46</sup> In the aftermath, other guerrilla groups withdrew from their own ongoing peace negotiations, and FARC resumed its operations in June 1987.<sup>47</sup> Subsequent attempts to negotiate peace, most recently during the Uribe administration, also failed.<sup>48</sup> These

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend: US Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s," *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 (2006): 95-116.

<sup>43</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, 191-196. FARC is the largest, but not the only, guerrilla movement in Colombia. Others include Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), a Cuba-oriented group whose ideology combines influences from Marxism and liberation theology, and the populist 19<sup>th</sup> of April Movement (M-19) which was known for its media-savvy, and strong urban membership of students and intellectuals (it has since demobilized and entered mainstream politics as the Alianza Democrática M-19).

<sup>44</sup> Peter Calvert, "Guerrilla Movements" in *Developments in Latin American Political Economy: States, Markets and Actors* ed. Julia Buxton and Nicola Phillips (Manchester University Press: 1999), 116-117.

<sup>45</sup> Safford and Palacios, *Colombia*, 356-357.

<sup>46</sup> Safford and Palacios, *Colombia*, 356-357. See also Suzanne Wilson and Leah Carroll, "The Colombian Contradiction: Lessons Drawn from Guerrilla Experiments in Demobilization and Electoralism," In *From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa*, edited by Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close and Gary Provost (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>47</sup> Calvert, "Guerrilla Movements," 117.

<sup>48</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

experiences cemented FARC's distrust of, and frustration with, the non-violent political path.

The economic and political conditions which led to FARC's formation in the 1960s – poverty and political exclusion enforced by violence – would also lead to its dramatic growth in the post-Cold War era.

### **3.2 Organization**

FARC is now the largest professional guerilla army in Colombia and in the Americas.<sup>49</sup> At the time of its founding in 1964, FARC was composed of just 46 men.<sup>50</sup> By the first decade of the twenty-first century, its membership is estimated to be as high as 18 000 combatants.<sup>51</sup> The movement is led by a seven-member Secretariat and has maintained remarkably consistent leadership over many decades.<sup>52</sup> Manuel Marulanda avoided capture despite a \$5 million bounty on his head and died of a heart attack in 2008.<sup>53</sup> He was replaced as commander-in-chief by Alfonso Cano, a bookish former student activist and FARC's long-time chief negotiator. Cano himself was killed in early November 2011 at the age of 63, when the Colombian military bombed his jungle camp in Cauca.<sup>54</sup> He was replaced as leader by Timoleón "Timochenko" Jiménez.<sup>55</sup>

Much of FARC's senior leadership is of rather advanced age. In contrast, FARC's rank and file membership is young and reflects the diversity of Colombian society. While FARC began as a rural, peasant-based organization, its membership

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<sup>49</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia", 20-33.

<sup>50</sup> Green, "A Trip to the Market", 116.

<sup>51</sup> Walker and Grey, *Historical Dictionary*, xxxv.

<sup>52</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia", 22-23.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Rory Carroll, "Leader of Colombia's Biggest Rebel Group has Died, Guerrillas Confirm," *The Guardian* 26 May 2008. [www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/26/colombia](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/may/26/colombia); Simon Romero, "Manuel Marulanda, 'Top Commander of Colombia's Largest Guerrilla Group, Is Dead' 26 May 2008. [www.nytimes.com/2008/05/26/world/americas/26marulanda.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/26/world/americas/26marulanda.html).

<sup>54</sup> "Colombian Forces Kill FARC Leader", *Al Jazeera English Aljazeera.com*, 6 Nov 2011. See also "Obituary: Alfonso Cano", *BBC News* 5 November 2011. [www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15604609](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15604609). Alfonso Cano was born Guillermo León Sáenz, to a middle class family in Bogota in 1948. He studied anthropology and law at the National University where he developed an interest in politics and rose to leadership in the Communist Youth movement. After joining FARC in the 1970s, Cano was placed in charge of fundraising and later became FARC's chief negotiator. In the late 1990s, he founded the radical, clandestine political group, the Bolivarian Movement for a New Colombia.

<sup>55</sup> "Colombian president says end of war with Farc rebels is near", *guardian.co.uk*, 25 November 2011.

has grown to include indigenous and Afro-Colombians, displaced peoples, urban intellectuals, union members and other sectors of the urban workforce.<sup>56</sup> Much of the rank-and-file membership are teenagers and twenty-somethings.<sup>57</sup> FARC has received widespread criticism for employing child soldiers and, in response, announced that it would dismiss soldiers younger than 15 years of age from its ranks. Nevertheless, the Colombian army claims it continues to capture younger combatants.<sup>58</sup>

The number of FARC members who are women is astonishing. Some reports indicate that 45% of FARC members and *commandantes* are women.<sup>59</sup> Other sources estimate the absolute number of female members to be over 5 000, or about one third of the total force.<sup>60</sup> In any case, the proportion is significant.

FARC has been able to maintain an unusually large and effective professional force because it is financially healthy. Its annual operating budget is estimated at roughly \$500 million.<sup>61</sup> FARC raises funds by extorting transnational corporations – particularly those working in Colombia's energy and extractive sectors – and by kidnapping foreigners and high-profile politicians, holding them until ransom demands are met.<sup>62</sup> During the 1990s, Colombia achieved the unfortunate distinction of having both the world's highest absolute number of kidnappings and the world's highest kidnapping rate. Paramilitaries and drug cartels also frequently kidnap, but according to the Colombian Ministry of Defense, about 56% of kidnappings are attributable to FARC and other guerrillas, with over half being for the purpose of collecting ransom.<sup>63</sup>

More significantly, FARC has been widely accused of fundraising through cocaine production and drug trafficking, and has been targeted by numerous American counter-insurgency operations conducted under the guise of the War on Drugs. FARC is, indeed, involved in the narcotics industry. FARC taxes coca

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<sup>56</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia", 22-23.

<sup>57</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 138.

<sup>58</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 138.

<sup>59</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia", 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> Martin Hodgson, "Girls Swap Diapers for Rebel Life," *Christian Science Monitor*, 10 June 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

<sup>62</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 138-140.

<sup>63</sup> Pshisva and Suarez, "Captive Markets", 7-9.

production in areas under its control. (In true leftist style, it is a progressive system that exempts small producers while taxing large plantations as well as refiners of coca paste and cocaine, importers of processing chemicals, and transportation of the finished product.) Taxation of the coca industry is estimated to account for between 40% and 70% of FARC's budget. Reports also indicate that FARC is taking a more active role in the industry by, among other things, building paste factories and airstrips, and overseeing the monopolization of coca leaf purchases.<sup>64</sup> FARC is apparently heavily invested. In 2011, Colombian police reportedly seized a FARC-owned submarine in Buenaventura. Believed to be used for drug smuggling, the 16 metre long vessel was estimated to cost US\$2 million and could hold a crew of five.<sup>65</sup>

However, while FARC's resurgence did occur alongside the growth of the Colombian drug trade, its relationship to it is more complicated than many acknowledge. Its involvement was partly spurred by the widespread turn to coca production by small farmers and coffee growers during the 1990s. FARC protected their interests by, among other things, compelling traffickers to pay fair market prices for coca leaves and labour.<sup>66</sup> In 1999, FARC participated in a United Nations project to replace coca farming with alternative forms of legal economic development. In 2000, the representative for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Klaus Nyholm, stated, "Guerillas are something different than the traffickers...in some areas, they're not involved at all. And in others, they actively tell the farmers not to grow coca."<sup>67</sup> In fact, both the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) reject the characterization of FARC as Colombia's primary drug traffickers.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, the Council on Hemispheric Affairs has found evidence of extensive drug smuggling by Colombia's armed forces, key financial figures and senior government bureaucrats, all in collaboration with paramilitary groups that

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<sup>64</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

<sup>65</sup> "Farc's drug submarine seized in Colombia", *BBC News bbc.co.uk*, 24 September 2011.

<sup>66</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

<sup>67</sup> Doug Stokes, *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia* (Zed Books: New York, 2005), 102.

<sup>68</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 86-87.

control the most important drug trafficking networks in Colombia.<sup>69</sup> In 1996, President Ernesto Samper received campaign donations from drug traffickers, leading the United States to “decertify” the Colombian government.<sup>70</sup> In February 2007, five politicians were arrested for ties to “paramilitary cocaine-trafficking squads,” including the brother of Colombia’s Foreign Minister.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, some scholars argue that economic growth created by the drug trade has led to the development of a “narco-state” in Colombia controlled by a “narco-bourgeoisie”, and that the counter-insurgency war is partly driven by the state’s desire to monopolize production and distribution of narcotics.<sup>72</sup> The point here is that cocaine production and drug trafficking are an important part of the Colombian economy in which virtually every sector of society either directly participates or is otherwise entangled. FARC and other guerilla groups are not a nefarious exception to the rule, and surely cannot be held to a higher legal or ethical standard than the Colombian government itself.<sup>73</sup>

Despite its remarkable longevity and recruiting success, FARC has been criticized for a simultaneous failure to develop a “sophisticated political-ideological package” or clear alternative development model.<sup>74</sup> These criticisms may be unfair.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Stokes, *America’s Other War*, 88-101.

<sup>70</sup> Maria Clemencia Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State: The Cocalero Movement, Citizenship, and Identity in the Colombian Amazon*, Trans. Andy Klatt (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Romero, “Foreign Minister of Colombia Quits in Scandal,” *Nytimes.com*, 20 February 2007.

<sup>72</sup> Oliver Villar and Drew Cottle, *Cocaine, Death Squads and the War on Terror: U.S. Imperialism and Class Struggle in Colombia* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> See also Romero, “Foreign Minister of Colombia Quits in Scandal,” *Nytimes.com* 20 February 2007; Sheldon Oliver, “Canadian Free Trade Report Ignores Human Rights Abuses in Colombia: Amnesty International” *Colombia Reports* 23 May 2014. <http://colombiareports.co/canadian-free-trade-report-ignores-human-rights-abuses-colombia-amnesty-international/>. Despite persistent government corruption and widespread human rights violations connected to the narco-state, successive Colombian regimes have been lauded as positive examples of liberal democracy by Western governments. Both the United States and Canada consider Colombia a close ally and valuable trade partner. The Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (CCOFTA) went into effect in 2011.

<sup>74</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 133-134.

<sup>75</sup> FARC communiqués have expressed a certain amount of indignation at the suggestion that the leadership is insufficiently theoretical or that FARC’s membership is poorly educated in Marxism-Leninism. See e.g. Pablo Catatumbo, “The Theoretical Consistency and Capacity of the FARC,” FARC-EP Peace Delegation, 26 July 2014. <http://farc-epeace.org/index.php/point-of-view/item/462-the-theoretical-consistency-and-capacity-of-the-farc.html>.



In its voluminous literature<sup>76</sup>, FARC does outline a number of salient criticisms of the Colombian state, neo-liberal economic reforms, and economic and class inequity. It has criticized the state as a "false democracy" that presides over a highly exclusionary political process, and attacked government corruption. It has also condemned state-sanctioned human rights abuses and the government's warm relationship with paramilitary groups.<sup>77</sup>

Because FARC has always drawn support from the rural poor, it has constructed a political platform that addresses the peasantry's concerns.<sup>78</sup> FARC officially defined its policy and objectives in July 1964 when it published *The Agrarian Program of the Guerrillas*<sup>79</sup>, its primary political platform. It was corrected and reissued in 1993 by the 8<sup>th</sup> National Conference. In it, FARC calls for major land reforms, including the confiscation of land from large landowners and free distribution to "peasants who work it or want to work it." Tenant farmers, occupants, renters, sharecroppers and labourers would receive property titles for the land they work, and all systems of sharecropping and rent in money or in kind would be eliminated. (The property of affluent farmers who worked their own land, however, would be respected.)<sup>80</sup>

The program also outlines a system of agrarian credit, subsidies, technical assistance and guaranteed prices for agricultural products. In addition to the provision of health and education services in rural areas (many of which lack social

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<sup>76</sup> See e.g. "Agrarian Programme of the Guerrillas", *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, Toronto: International Commission of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army, 1999; *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, Toronto: International Commission of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army, 1999. See also the official website of FARC-EP, <http://www.farc-ep.co>, and the official website of the Peace Delegation of the FARC-EP, <http://farc-epeace.org>. Note that while FARC's policy and political objectives, as outlined primarily in *The Agrarian Policy of the Guerrillas*, is not explicitly Marxist, this seems to be a function of pragmatism and a desire to construct a platform that appeals widely to its base of rural supporters. In communiqués, FARC explicitly describes itself as Marxist. For example, the official website of FARC's peace delegation includes the descriptor: "We are Marxist-Leninist and Bolivarian, also communists, not "pro-soviet" or "pro-Castro", although we do feel identified with the principles of both revolutions, in particular with the Cuban Revolution, which continues illuminating the world with proud and dignity...As People's Army we undertake military actions against our class enemy and their repressive apparatus." See e.g. <http://farc-epeace.org/index.php/general-information-farc-ep.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 133-134.

<sup>78</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 133-134.

<sup>79</sup> "Agrarian Programme of the Guerrillas", *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, Toronto: International Commission of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army, 1999: 113-119.

<sup>80</sup> "Agrarian Programme", *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 113-119.

services entirely), irrigation and electrification systems would be extended to remote rural areas. The program also proposes to erase all the debts owed by peasants to “usurers, speculators and official and semi-official institutions of credit.” Finally, it calls for state control over strategic resources (especially the energy sector), and for the confiscation of “lands occupied by U.S. imperialist companies, whatever title they may have and to whatever activity they may be dedicated.”<sup>81</sup>

The Agrarian Program also outlines plans specifically for indigenous communities. While these communities would also be provided with land and technical assistance, and with all of the above mentioned public services, they would be represented by autonomous organizations, “respecting their councils, way of life, culture, languages and internal organization.”<sup>82</sup>

Also at the 8<sup>th</sup> National Conference, FARC expanded its political platform by issuing the Platform for a Government of National Reconciliation and Reconstruction. In it, FARC calls for a number of political changes, including the election of the attorney general and Supreme Court, an independent electoral branch, a unicameral legislature, guaranteed access of the opposition to communications media, and general freedom of the press. FARC also repeated its calls for state ownership and administration of the energy industry, communications, public services, roads, ports and all natural resources, as well as protectionist policies, greater union and academic participation in policy-making, a graduated tax scheme, and emphasis on broadening the internal market and self-sufficiency in agriculture and industry (“the solidarity economy”). Further, the platform called for greater investment and transparency in natural resource extraction, particularly pertaining to the Cusiana oilfield. FARC also called for a ten-year moratorium on debt-servicing, the cancellation of all military pacts with foreign powers, and the pursuit of “equilibrium between society and the natural environment.” Curiously for an organization accused of ties to drug trafficking, FARC’s final demand was a solution

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<sup>81</sup> “Agrarian Programme”, *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 113-119.

<sup>82</sup> “Agrarian Programme”, *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 113-119.

to the problem of “production, commercialization and consumption of narcotics...a grave social problem that cannot be dealt with militarily.”<sup>83</sup>

In more recent years, FARC has increasingly used the language of Bolivarianism to describe its ideology and platform. Simón Bolívar is now idolized by FARC as a national hero and as a symbol of the struggle against American imperialism. The use of this term also suggests an ideological affinity with Venezuela's late Hugo Chavez.<sup>84</sup>

Critics have condemned FARC as a purely criminal organization of “dinosaur Marxists with a taste for Rambo-style violence,” that lost sight of its “earlier, utopian Socialist objectives”. Even former sympathizers have condemned FARC for its military focus.<sup>85</sup> Yet, FARC is unapologetic about its methods and military success, flatly stating that violence and terror tactics are justified in revolution.<sup>86</sup>

### **3.3 Post-1990 Growth**

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, and in the face of increasingly brutal counter-insurgency operations, FARC grew dramatically throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium. In fact, during the 1990s FARC's military capacity increased more than it did during the previous thirty years combined.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the 1960s, there were never more than 500 combatants in all of Colombia's numerous insurgent groups. Between 1986 and 1995, however, FARC grew from 3 600 guerillas fighting on 32 fronts, to 7 000 guerillas fighting on 60 fronts. By 2000, FARC was estimated to have over 15 000 combatants in its ranks.<sup>88</sup> By 2002, estimates had risen to 18 000 combatants and were growing.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Platform for a Government of National Reconciliation and Reconstruction, *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, Toronto: International Commission of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia People's Army, 1999: 123-126.

<sup>84</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 134-135.

<sup>85</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, 196-200.

<sup>86</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 138-139.

<sup>87</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 88, 131.

<sup>88</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 88, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Peceny and Durnan, “The FARC’s Best Friend”, 95-116.

Other estimates placed the number of leftist guerrillas in Colombia at 22 000 fighters in 2000.<sup>90</sup>

This increase in membership occurred alongside territorial expansion, especially into wealthier, more populous regions and along strategically important borders with Venezuela, Panama and Ecuador.<sup>91</sup> A 1997 study revealed that FARC was influential in 622 of 1050 municipalities.<sup>92</sup> By 1999, FARC was believed to effectively control 60% of Colombian territory.<sup>93</sup> Of particular note was the “demilitarized zone” encompassing 42 000 square kilometers in Meta and Caqueta – an area the size of Switzerland – which was given over to FARC during peace negotiations with the Pastrana government.<sup>94</sup> The period of FARC control in the region was apparently a peaceful one, with observers reporting a reduction in crime and an end to paramilitary violence. FARC was also reported to have fired several local mayors for corruption.<sup>95</sup> In fact, roughly 740 000 Colombians migrated *to* the demilitarized zone before it was re-taken by the Colombian military in 2002.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the loss of the DMZ, as recently as 2005 it was estimated that FARC maintained a presence in *every* municipality in Colombia. In some areas, FARC has assumed many government powers and responsibilities, including the building and staffing of schools and medical facilities, and the administration of ad hoc “peoples’ courts”.<sup>97</sup> In Putumayo, for example, FARC “acts like a state and fulfills the functions of a government by exercising local power and territorial control, regulating the illegal coca market, and enacting laws and norms enforced with strict sanctions.”<sup>98</sup> In the Baja Bota region of Cauca, for example, where FARC has operated for several decades, residents view the local guerrilla

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<sup>90</sup> Suzanne Wilson and Leah Carroll, “The Colombian Contradiction: Lessons Drawn from Guerrilla Experiments in Demobilization and Electoralism,” In *From Revolutionary Movements to Political Parties: Cases from Latin America and Africa*, edited by Kalowatie Deonandan, David Close and Gary Provost (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

<sup>91</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 362.

<sup>92</sup> Brittain, “The FARC-EP in Colombia, 23-24.

<sup>93</sup> Brittain, “The FARC-EP in Colombia, 23-24.

<sup>94</sup> Geoff Simmons, *Colombia: A Brutal History*. London: SAQI, 2004.

<sup>95</sup> Simmons, *A Brutal History*, 199-202.

<sup>96</sup> Brittain, “The FARC-EP in Colombia, 23-24.

<sup>97</sup> Brittain, “The FARC-EP in Colombia, 23-24.

<sup>98</sup> Maria Clemencia Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State: The Cocalero Movement, Citizenship, and Identity in the Colombian Amazon*. Trans. Andy Klatt. Durham: Duke University Press, 2011, 13.

commander as the primary authority in the area. FARC frequently holds meetings with communities there to discuss local civic matters.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to astounding growth in membership and territory, FARC exacted a number of political victories in the 1990s. FARC achieved international recognition as a principle belligerent in Colombia and insisted on bilateral negotiations with the Colombian government, excluding both other guerrilla factions and civil society organizations. FARC also succeeded in having client politicians elected to mayoral and governors' offices, allowing it to increase the financial resources of municipalities under its control, and consolidating and legitimizing its role as an "alternative political class." FARC also began holding conferences in the jungle with international business leaders, including one in 1999 with the chair of the New York Stock Exchange.<sup>100</sup>

FARC's public relations successes abroad were even more impressive. In early 2000, the FARC leadership embarked on an extensive tour of Europe, which was so successful that in the following year the European Parliament agreed to condemn American counter-insurgency operations against FARC, including Plan Colombia. Although a wave of kidnappings eventually soured FARC's European relationships, this trip nevertheless presented FARC as a power on par with the Colombian government, and was a severe embarrassment to the inept Pastrana government.<sup>101</sup>

FARC is often labeled a “narco-guerrilla” movement, especially in American policy circles. It is similarly described in some academic literature as a “quasi-criminal” enterprise dedicated to extracting rents from natural resource exports. Often, its success is dismissed as purely a product of increased participation in the drug trade. In “The FARC’s Best Friend: US Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia’s Civil War in the 1990s”, Peceny and Durnan argue that its narcotics-based income is the single most important factor in explaining FARC’s growth in the 1990s. Indeed, structural changes to the cocaine industry during the 1990s – including the destruction of the Medellin and Cali

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<sup>99</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 141, 364.

<sup>101</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 141, 364.

cartels (FARC's most powerful military opponents), and the disruption of transnational supply networks – did increasingly drive coca cultivation into FARC-controlled regions and provide unprecedented opportunities to fund and strengthen the insurgency.<sup>102</sup> However, they also note that while “this perspective holds a kernel of truth”, nevertheless, the political economy literature on “greed-driven rebellions,”

...cannot fully explain the character of the Colombian civil war. It cannot identify the origins of an insurgency that has recently celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> year in existence. Nor can it explain the longstanding ideological vision of the FARC or its social base among some sectors of the Colombian rural proletariat.<sup>103</sup>

The post-Cold War era was clearly a time of triumph for FARC. So, what else was happening in Colombia that led to this improbable turn of events? Did the Colombian people not know that Marxism was supposed to be dead? It is no coincidence that this growth in FARC's membership, territory, military effectiveness and political influence corresponded with, first, Colombia's adoption of neo-liberal economic policies and, second, political exclusion enforced by state violence.

### **3.4 Neoliberalism**

Unlike much of Latin America, Colombia avoided the debt crisis of the 1980s and did not liberalize until the following decade.<sup>104</sup> Colombia's first

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<sup>102</sup> Peceny and Durnan, “The FARC's Best Friend”, 95-116.

<sup>103</sup> Peceny and Durnan, “The FARC's Best Friend”, 95-116.

<sup>104</sup> Terry Gibbs and Garry Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism: From Cape Breton to Colombia and Beyond* (Sydney: Cape Breton University Press, 2009), 49. For more information on economic reforms in Latin America, see e.g. Duncan Green, “A trip to the market: the impact of neoliberalism in Latin America,” *Developments in Latin American Political Economy: States, Markets and Actors* ed. Julia Buxton and Nicola Phillips (Vancouver: Manchester University Press, 1999), 13-15. Latin America began a process of intense neoliberal market reform in 1982, when the Mexican default signaled the onset of a continent-wide debt crisis. At the time, it was widely believed that the import substitution model had failed, and reformers were in power the United States and Europe. Reforms were first enacted in Chile under the regime of General Augusto Pinochet by a team of economists and technocrats trained by Milton Friedman and Arnold Harberger, and known as the “Chicago Boys”. Lacking foreign exchange as a result of the debt crisis, governments turned to the International Monetary Fund for relief, which took the opportunity to implement a rapid program of neoliberal reforms. Although program details varied from one country to another, the reforms occurred in the same three general stages: i) *Stabilization*: to contain inflation, severe austerity programs were implemented, which included public sector spending cuts

significant neo-liberal reforms were implemented in 1990, a moment that has since come to be known as *la apertura* or “the opening”. President César Gaviria introduced the reforms quietly over 18 months while the public's attention was focused on his flashier political reforms, including attempts to make peace with FARC and to rewrite the constitution.<sup>105</sup>

Imports were dramatically liberalized, with average import duties falling from 40% in 1990 to 12% in 1992, and the number of imports subject to licenses reduced from almost 50% to 3%. Colombia's exchange controls – often credited with maintaining a stable real exchange rate – were virtually abolished. This proved deeply unpopular with both Colombian economists and the general public. Labour regulations were also reformed, including a reduction in severance payments and elimination of indexation on unemployment subsidies, while salaries, benefits and hours worked were made negotiable. Banking reforms were introduced, including the reduction of reserve requirements and freeing of most interest rates. Controls over foreign direct investment were relaxed, the financial sector was deregulated, the insurance industry was liberalized, and the tax system was reformed. Many state sectors were privatized.<sup>106</sup>

The mass privatization of state corporations – including banks, utilities and mining companies – resulted in massive layoffs and forced many workers into the informal sector. Between 1992 and 2000, the number of Colombians working in the informal economy increased to over 61% of the workforce.<sup>107</sup> Simultaneously, unionization dramatically declined, especially in the public sector. Between 1991

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and sharp increases in interest rates; ii) *Structural adjustment*: a broader program that included removing artificial market distortions such as price controls and trade tariffs, allowing an unregulated market to determine prices. A broader process of deregulation of trade, finance and investment is enacted, including the privatization of state firms. Also, “structural rigidities in the labour market” will be removed by cutting labour costs (by making it easier to hire and fire employees, restricting trade union activity, and encouraging “flexibility” through short-term contracts and subcontracting); iii) *Export-led growth*: the ultimate aim of structural adjustment; at this stage, governments give priority to exports, remove trade barriers and encourage the private sector to diversify and find new markets for its products.

<sup>105</sup> Sebastian Edwards, *The Economics and Politics of Transition to an Open Market Economy: Colombia* (Development Centre of the OECD, 2001), 9-11, 43-51

<sup>106</sup> Edwards, *The Economic and Politics of Transition*, 9-11, 43-51

<sup>107</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 54-55. As a result of working outside the formal economy, informal workers lack a steady income, health benefits and pensions, and suffer from extreme financial insecurity. This “invisible class” is often regarded as disposable, and irrelevant to macro-economic indicators.

and 2001, over 195 trade unions were dissolved, reducing union membership in Colombia by more than 100 000 workers.<sup>108</sup> Colombia now has the lowest unionization rate in Latin America, down from 15% in 1990 to less than 5% of the total workforce in 2007.<sup>109</sup>

Colombia's all-important oil and mining sectors were also reformed. The oil sector was transformed in 2003 to comply with the terms of an IMF loan agreement. The practice whereby the state oil company, Ecopetrol, owned 50% of all oil produced by foreign companies in Colombia, was eliminated. Additionally, the royalty rate multinationals pay on each barrel of oil produced in Colombia was reduced from 20% to 8%.<sup>110</sup> In 2000, again as part of an IMF loan agreement, Colombia privatized the state coal company, Carbocol, selling its 50% share in the Cerrejon coal mine<sup>111</sup> to a consortium of international mining companies. In 2001, Colombia's mining code was rewritten to, among other things, reduce royalty rates on coal from 10-15% to 0.4%.<sup>112</sup> In the words of Francisco Ramirez, president of the Colombian State Mineworkers' Union (Sintraminercol):

With the stroke of a pen, once again the nation lost enormous sums of money which could have been used to address social problems, like the fact that 80 children in Colombia perish every day from hunger, malnutrition and curable diseases.<sup>113</sup>

Incidentally, Ramirez has, as of 2009, survived no less than seven assassination attempts.<sup>114</sup>

Colombia's traditionally stable coffee economy was also devastated by neo-liberal reforms (in this case, international reforms). In 1989, the United States unilaterally dismantled the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), which had long

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<sup>108</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 54-55.

<sup>109</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 54-55.

<sup>110</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 56.

<sup>111</sup> The Cerrejon became the world's largest open-pit coal mine in the late 1990s. It is 45 km long and 8 km across.

<sup>112</sup> Chris Arsenault, "Colombia: Foreign Firms Cashing in on Generous Mining Code," Inter Press Service, 22 October 2007 <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=39755> in Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 63-64. The Ministry of Mines was assisted in this endeavor by the law firm Martinez, Cordoba and Associates, representing half the mining companies registered in Colombia, as well as the Calgary-based think tank Canadian Energy Research Initiative and the Canadian International Development Agency.

<sup>113</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 64.

<sup>114</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 64.



established a price range for coffee that guaranteed growers a minimum return per pound. In the absence of the ICA, the global price of coffee would be determined by supply and demand, leaving Colombian coffee producers at the mercy of the vagaries of the international market. Soon after, the World Bank sponsored a development project in Vietnam centered on coffee production. The program was so successful that by 2001, Vietnam had surpassed Colombia to become the world's second-largest coffee producer.<sup>115</sup> The resulting global surfeit of coffee caused the market price to plummet from more than \$2 per pound to a mere 58 cents per pound. As Colombia's leading (legal) export for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this proved ruinous for Colombian coffee farmers.<sup>116</sup>

The virtual collapse of Colombia's coffee economy also had an unintended consequence: Colombian farmers turned *en masse* to coca production.<sup>117</sup> Previously, Colombia had been a significant processor and distributor of cocaine, but by 1997 Colombia had also become the world's largest producer of unprocessed coca leaf.<sup>118</sup> Much of this coca was grown by small farmers in marginal regions of the country, particularly the western Amazon. *Cocalero campesinos* (coca producers and harvest workers) did not have a coca tradition (unlike some indigenous peoples) but grew the crop "exclusively as a means of economic survival in a context of inadequate public services."<sup>119</sup> This reliance on coca would prove to have devastating consequences for many rural communities as they became targets in the on-going drug war.<sup>120</sup>

While some praised Colombia's neo-liberal reforms (notably, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), in reality, the reforms

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<sup>115</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 50-51.

<sup>116</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 50-51.

<sup>117</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 50-51.

<sup>118</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 3-5.

<sup>119</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 3-5.

<sup>120</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 3-5. For more information on neo-liberal reforms and the drug war, see e.g. Héctor Mondragón, "Democracy and Plan Colombia," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 40 (January 2007): 42-45. Corruption and collusion between the government and drug cartels also aggravated Colombia's economic difficulties while masking the reforms' immediate effects. For example, an agreement between the government and various paramilitary groups legalized billions of "narco-dollars" that paramilitaries use to finance their operations, resulting in a brief period of economic growth. The government's decision to offer amnesty to drug traffickers also resulted in a surge in exports. In 2005, \$3 billion moved through Colombia with no record of how the money entered the country.

aggravated existing poverty and inequality "on the ground" while simultaneously failing to accomplish immediate economic goals. For example, despite reducing import tariffs and protective structures, imports actually *declined* during the reform period.<sup>121</sup> And, by depreciating the real exchange rate, serious instability was introduced into the economy. By 1991, speculation had become rampant. The reforms also created a large balance of payments surplus and accumulation of international reserves, making monetary management exceedingly difficult.<sup>122</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of steadily worsening economic indicators, Gaviria's successors carried on his legacy of reform.<sup>123</sup> In 2000, Colombia adopted an IMF loan and restructuring package that led to drastic cuts in social services.<sup>124</sup> President Alvaro Uribe further extended neo-liberal reforms by, among other things, raising the age of retirement by one-third, and cutting the salaries of public sector workers by 33%.<sup>125</sup> By 2001, Colombia was mired in the most severe economic depression in its history, worse even than the Great Depression of the 1930s.<sup>126</sup> Unemployment hovered above 20% while industrial production fell by almost 20%. By 2002, about 40% of government revenues were earmarked for debt repayment.<sup>127</sup>

Although Colombia already had Latin America's third-worst distribution of income, the post-Cold War period witnessed further concentration of wealth. Colombia's gini coefficient rose from 0.55 in 1991 to 0.59 in 1999.<sup>128</sup> In 1990, the ratio of income between the poorest 10% and richest 10% of Colombians was 40:1; by 2000, the ratio had doubled to 80:1.<sup>129</sup> The richest 3% of Colombians now own over 70% of the country's arable land, and 37 *individuals* own fully half of

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<sup>121</sup> Edwards, *The Economic and Politics of Transition*, 48.

<sup>122</sup> Edwards, *The Economic and Politics of Transition*, 48

<sup>123</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 92.

<sup>124</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 120.

<sup>125</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia", 21.

<sup>126</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 120.

<sup>127</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 120.

<sup>128</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 121.

<sup>129</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia", 21.

Colombia's farmland.<sup>130</sup> The richest 1% of Colombians control almost half of the country's total wealth.<sup>131</sup>

The resulting flight of economic refugees from Colombia devastated the social fabric of both families and communities. Throughout the reform period, Colombians increasingly migrated overseas for work, especially to the United States, and Colombian families have become increasingly dependent on remittances. In 1999, Colombians received \$2.7 billion in remittances from relatives working abroad. Within five years, remittances rose to a total of \$3.7 billion, a staggering 220% increase. In 2002, Colombian labour minister Angelino Garzon was finally moved to admit that neo-liberal reforms had “contributed to the impoverishment of large sectors of the population.”<sup>132</sup>

This widespread and growing poverty fuelled FARC recruitment throughout the reform period, especially of women members. All FARC recruits, male and female, are motivated by economic factors. Women, however, were particularly vulnerable to the combination of economic collapse and disappearance of social services that characterized the reform period.<sup>133</sup> As Mariluz Rubio, a human rights ombudsman in San Vicente del Caguan notes, “Young people in rural areas have no alternatives. Their families don’t have money for education and there are no jobs...And this is still a very *macho* country. For women, the possibilities are even fewer.”<sup>134</sup> In rural communities particularly, many families regard educating girls as “a waste of time”. Girls often marry young, and become mothers as early as 12 years old.<sup>135</sup> In this context, a reduction in public investments and collapse of social services means that reforms may negatively impact women and girls even more than men and boys.

Eliana Gonzalez, one of the longest-serving women in FARC, cites poverty and a lack of opportunity for her own decision to join the movement. She became a guerrilla in 1974 because, in her own words, “I wanted to do something with my

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<sup>130</sup> Brittain, “The FARC-EP in Colombia”, 21.

<sup>131</sup> Brittain, “The FARC-EP in Colombia”, 21.

<sup>132</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 55-56.

<sup>133</sup> Hodgson, “Girls Swap Diapers for Rebel Life”, 10.

<sup>134</sup> Hodgson, “Girls Swap Diapers for Rebel Life”.

<sup>135</sup> Hodgson, “Girls Swap Diapers for Rebel Life”.

life. I wanted things to change.”<sup>136</sup> Three decades later, young female members tell much the same story. According to one comrade, Sandra, who left school at the age of ten to help raise her brothers and sisters, “Lots of women are here because their parents beat them, or just to get away from the poverty.” Another young member named Ana Maria, speaking to a reporter, said about the rebel life, “It’s tough, but at least you don’t have to worry where you’ll get food and clothes from.”<sup>137</sup> FARC recruitment dramatically increased throughout the reform period. Indeed, between 1986 and 1995, membership almost doubled, and by 2000 FARC was estimated to have over 15 000 combatants in its ranks.<sup>138</sup> By 2002, estimates had risen to 18 000 combatants and were growing.<sup>139</sup>

Neo-liberal reforms fuelled widespread dissatisfaction with the institutions of Colombian democracy, just as similar reforms did in the rest of Latin America. As Duncan Green noted in “A trip to the market: the impact of neo-liberalism in Latin America”,

By 1998, after 16 years of debt crisis, adjustment and undoubted pain, most Latin Americans were still waiting for the long-promised benefits of structural adjustment to “trickle down” to their neighborhoods. Although the rich had had a vintage decade, most of the region’s people were poorer and more insecure; their homes, communities, schools and hospitals were collapsing around them. Latin America was left trying to find its way in a cut-throat global economy, saddled with a population weakened by poverty and ignorance. Neoliberals had moderated their tone and now talked more about social cost and public spending, but their basic recipe remained unchanged as they insisted that the pay-off lay just around the corner. Small wonder that so many doubted their good faith and that disillusion with politicians of all hues was growing daily.<sup>140</sup>

The poverty and inequality created by neo-liberal restructuring “disarticulated both urban and rural society”, creating a mass of disaffected people who embraced ever more radical leftist movements, including guerrilla movements like FARC.<sup>141</sup> In the words of James Brittain, co-founder of the Atlantic Canada-Colombia Research Group, “it must be realized that as long as inequitable sociocultural and political-

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<sup>136</sup> Hodgson, “Girls Swap Diapers for Rebel Life”.

<sup>137</sup> Hodgson, “Girls Swap Diapers for Rebel Life”.

<sup>138</sup> Rochlin, *Vanguard Revolutionaries*, 88, 131.

<sup>139</sup> Peceny and Durnan, “The FARC’s Best Friend”, 95-116.

<sup>140</sup> Green, “A Trip to the Market”, 29.

<sup>141</sup> Calvert, “Guerrilla Movements”.

economic conditions pervade Colombian society so too will a base from which the FARC-EP can recruit.”<sup>142</sup>

However, neo-liberal reforms alone are not enough to explain the resurgence of FARC in the 1990s. After all, neo-liberal reforms had been enacted across Latin America and were, in many cases, even more severe. The region had only mixed results to show for a decade of painful reforms, and even those limited gains were achieved only at a profound social cost. According to the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, by 1994, 75 million people across Latin America had fallen into poverty.<sup>143</sup> Almost half subsisted on incomes of less than \$1 per day, while wages continued to shrink, the price of staple foods rose, and government services deteriorated.<sup>144</sup> According to the UN International Fund for Agricultural Development, across the continent 40 000 people died from chronic hunger *every day*.<sup>145</sup> A further 55 million were malnourished, and deaths due to malnutrition had doubled. Outrageously, cholera returned to the continent 60 years after it had been eradicated.<sup>146</sup> Nevertheless, Colombia is the only Latin American country with a significant guerrilla presence.

As Calvert notes, regardless of how miserable and desperate people may be, “economic conditions do not specifically require people to join guerrilla movements; though they may seem to leave insurgents little choice, in fact it is rare for individuals to not have the alternatives of accommodation...”<sup>147</sup> Elsewhere in Latin America, dissatisfaction with neo-liberal reforms translated into the election of leftist governments. In 1990, only two countries in the region governed from the left – Cuba and Nicaragua – both of which had assumed power in violent coups. By 2008, nine Latin American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela – together representing two thirds of the

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<sup>142</sup> Brittain, "The Continuity of FARC-EP".

<sup>143</sup> Green, "A Trip to the Market", 19-22.

<sup>144</sup> Green, "A Trip to the Market", 19-22.

<sup>145</sup> Green, "A Trip to the Market", 19-22.

<sup>146</sup> Green, "A Trip to the Market", 19-22.

<sup>147</sup> Calvert, "Guerrilla Movements", 112

continent's population, had elected governments from the left.<sup>148</sup> Significantly, as the left in Latin America grew more and more successful in the political arena, armed struggle became more and more a thing of the past. By 2006, FARC (and other Colombian guerrilla groups) remained the only leftist movement in the hemisphere to insist on the primacy of armed struggle.<sup>149</sup>

The triumph of the left in Latin America since the end of the Cold War has been nothing short of astonishing. However, this virtual revolution never reached Colombia, where right-wing, reactionary governments continue to rule, and the left continues to dodge (actual) bullets in the political (and literal) wilderness. Clearly, some other factor is at work in the Colombian context. What was happening in Colombia that led to a massive resurgence in armed struggle in the post-Cold War era that did not occur elsewhere in Latin America?

### **3.5 Political Exclusion Enforced by Violence**

In addition to neo-liberal economic reforms, FARC's recent growth was driven by the exclusion of the left from the political process, often by violent means. Colombia's political culture has always been characterized by clientelism, corruption and exclusion. Until the mid-1980s, most political offices were appointed rather than elected, and the National Front coalition shared all government posts equally between the ruling Conservative and Liberal parties on an alternating basis.<sup>150</sup> Presidents appointed governors, who in turn appointed mayors, all according to their ability to generate votes.<sup>151</sup> In the words of one analyst:

A key feature of the National Front period was that major producer and employer associations, representing dominant and allied class interests,

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<sup>148</sup> Jorge Castañeda and Marco Morales, "The Current State of the Utopia," In *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left*, edited by Jorge Castañeda and Marco Morales (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1-5.

<sup>149</sup> Jorge Castañeda, "Where Do We Go From Here?" In *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left*, edited by Jorge Castañeda and Marco Morales (New York: Routledge, 2008), 233-234.

<sup>150</sup> Washington Office on Latin America, "Colombia Cracks Down," *Colombia Monitor* July 2002, [www.wola.org/publications/briefing\\_series.htm#Colombia\\_monitor](http://www.wola.org/publications/briefing_series.htm#Colombia_monitor).

<sup>151</sup> Wilson and Carroll, "The Colombian Contradiction".

enjoyed privileged access to the policy process while subordinate classes (the peasantry, workers and the urban poor) had little or none.<sup>152</sup>

The National Front coalition ended decades ago, but this process of political exclusion endures. Colombia's major parties are still organized according to family, kinship and business relationships, most continue to be free of any programmatic substance, and votes are often exchanged for state patronage. This closed political system concentrates power in the hands of a small, relatively cohesive ruling class. Colombian democracy has thus been described as "democracy lite" or "exclusionary democracy".<sup>153</sup>

The exclusion of outsiders from the political process has been further enforced by a series of draconian, anti-democratic laws targeting the poor, civil society organizations, human rights campaigners and the political left. In 2002, President Uribe declared a state of "internal commotion" that allowed the government to prohibit public rallies, impose curfews and conduct searches without a court order.<sup>154</sup> Uribe also granted judicial police powers to the armed forces, attempted to replace local governments with direct military rule, and suggested that the government would reform the Constitution, "in particular some of its important human rights mechanisms and safeguards."<sup>155</sup>

It is, however, the remarkable level of political violence in Colombia that contributes most significantly to the Left's political exclusion. The Colombian military has one of the worst human rights records in the world. It employs torture routinely, often against civilians.<sup>156</sup> In providing training to the Colombian military, the United States has overtly advocated the use of terror tactics against civilians, including the use of physical violence, abduction, targeting of family members, and use of children as potential information sources.<sup>157</sup> According to

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<sup>152</sup> Carlos Juarez, "Trade and Development Policies in Colombia: Export Promotion and Outward Orientation, 1967-1992," *Studies in Comparative and International Development* 28 (1993): 67-97, in Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 50.

<sup>153</sup> WOLA, "Colombia Cracks Down".

<sup>154</sup> Washington Office on Latin America, *Plan Colombia 3 Year Anniversary Report Card* 12 January 2007, [www.wola.org/publications/briefing\\_series.htm#Colombia\\_monitor](http://www.wola.org/publications/briefing_series.htm#Colombia_monitor).

<sup>155</sup> "Colombia," *Amnesty International Report 2003*, [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org).

<sup>156</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 61-97.

<sup>157</sup> Héctor Mondragon, "Democracy and Plan Colombia," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 40 (January 2007): 42-45.

Amnesty International, “Colombian army personnel trained by US Special Forces have been implicated by action or omission in serious human rights violations, including the massacre of civilians.”<sup>158</sup>

But for all the crimes of the Colombian military, it is closely allied paramilitary groups that are responsible for nearly 80% of all recorded human rights abuses in Colombia.<sup>159</sup> “Paras”, as paramilitaries are known, are private security organizations with close ties to the drug trade and the wider business community. They are notorious for “widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations.”<sup>160</sup> It is a poorly kept secret that paramilitaries function as a clandestine wing of the army and police, as “soldiers who are not really soldiers but more like ghosts flitting between the visible and the invisible, between the regular army and the criminal underworld of killers and torturers...”<sup>161</sup> By some estimates, paramilitary outfits have replaced the police and military as the primary counter-insurgency force in Colombia.<sup>162</sup>

Paramilitaries perform a number of roles and help distance the Colombian military from the most ghoulish aspects of the counter-insurgency war against FARC. Notoriously, paras impose “law and order” in rural areas (where FARC

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<sup>158</sup> “Terror Trade Times,” *Amnesty International Arms and Security Transfers*, June 2001  
<http://web.amnesty.org/web/ttt.nsf/june2001/colombia>.

<sup>159</sup> “Colombia,” *Human Rights Watch World Report 2001*  
[www.hrw.org/wr2k1/americas/colombia3.html](http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/americas/colombia3.html).

<sup>160</sup> “Terror Trade Times,” *Amnesty International*.

<sup>161</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, xi-xiii, 9-10.

<sup>162</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, xi-xiii, 9-10. Paramilitary groups are not necessarily formal, organized groups; they may be private security employed by large landowners, or locally raised self-defense organizations. Others are large, highly organized, and recognized as “legitimate” by the Colombian government. Paramilitaries now reportedly employ more people than the police and military combined. Paramilitaries were first organized by landowners and businessmen who believed that the military and police were incapable of defending them from guerrillas. Paramilitary groups grew dramatically in number and size throughout the 1980s. During this period, drug traffickers (especially the infamous Medellin cartel) acquired large tracts of cattle land in FARC-controlled Magdalena, as well as emerald mines and other investments. Cartels funneled large sums of money to paramilitaries to protect their newly acquired property and coca plantations. Their intention was to raise an irregular force that could “fight a war of terror so terrible that peasant support for the guerrilla would evaporate”. Today, paramilitaries number in the tens of thousands, controlling key cities in the northeast and ports along the Pacific coast. They depend on the drug trade to finance their operations. See also Peceny and Durnan. “The FARC’s Best Friend”. *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC) is Colombia’s largest paramilitary group. A coalition that was forged during the mid-1990s and led by Carlos Castano, it is a well-equipped and trained national force that numbers nearly 15 000 soldiers and has a budget in excess of \$100 million. Approximately 80% of its funds are derived from the cocaine trade. AUC leaders claim that its partisans filled one third of the congressional seats contested in 2002.



sympathizers are suspected to lurk) through systematic mass assassinations, called *limpiezas*<sup>163</sup>. A *limpieza* begins with the arrival in a village of a convoy of SUVs carrying uniformed, armed men. The “paras” consult a list of victims, round them up, torture and kill them, often with machetes or chainsaws. The bodies are then suspended in public view. By 2001, *limpiezas* had evolved into more lengthy affairs, with paras establishing themselves in communities for months or as long as a year, conducting assassinations slowly over time and leaving villagers to watch with bated breath, wondering who would be next. Over 90 *limpiezas* were reported in 2001 alone.<sup>164</sup> Such widespread paramilitary violence helps account for Colombia’s extraordinarily high number of internal refugees.<sup>165</sup>

Since the early 1990s, paramilitary violence in Colombia has dramatically increased. The victims are primarily trade unionists, journalists, teachers, human rights workers and the poor.<sup>166</sup> Between 1999 and 2003, over 4000 civilians in Colombia were killed for political motives.<sup>167</sup> In 2002 alone, 178 trade unionists in Colombia were killed.<sup>168</sup> According to the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), “Colombia remains one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a governor, a journalist, a labor leader, a mayor, or a human rights defender.”<sup>169</sup>

Both the Colombian government and military maintain close ties to paramilitary groups.<sup>170</sup> According to Amnesty International, “there is conclusive evidence that paramilitary groups continue to operate with the tacit or active

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<sup>163</sup> *Limpieza* means “cleansing” or “to purge the unclean” (a not very subtle invocation of the language of genocide).

<sup>164</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, xi, 201.

<sup>165</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, xi, 201. For more information on internal refugees and displacement in Colombia, see e.g. Stokes, *America's Other War*, 94-95; “Colombia,” *Amnesty International Report 2003*; Brittain, “The Continuity of FARC-EP Resistance in Colombia”. In 2001, Colombia became the world's fourth-largest host of internally displaced people (2 million in a population of 40 million) when a record 341 000 people fled their homes. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the vast majority of displacements were caused by paramilitary threats and violence. In 2007, the number of internally displaced people in Colombia increased by 38%, making Colombia second only to Sudan for the largest number of refugees in the world. As late as 2007, Colombia had over one million more refugees than the entire Middle East region (including post-invasion Iraq) combined. The number of internally displaced people in Colombia hovers above 4 million.

<sup>166</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 65.

<sup>167</sup> “Colombia”, *Amnesty International*.

<sup>168</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 65.

<sup>169</sup> WOLA, *Plan Colombia 3 Year Anniversary Report Card*.

<sup>170</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 61-97.

support of the Colombian armed forces.”<sup>171</sup> For example, the Colombian military helps facilitate *limpiezas* by providing paramilitaries with safe passage to and from targeted villages, and by sealing-off those areas by conducting mock military exercises.<sup>172</sup> Alirio Uribe, one of Colombia’s leading human rights lawyers and a member of the José Alvear Restrepo Lawyers’ Collective, describes the *paras*’ relationship with the government as extraordinarily close:

Historically, the paramilitaries represented the privatization of the dirty war...the State could say that it has nothing to do with it because the paramilitaries are responsible. But the paramilitaries have never been independent from the state.<sup>173</sup>

Former president Uribe himself is believed to have close ties with the paramilitary outfit United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC) that go back to his time as a young politician in Medellín.<sup>174</sup> Practically speaking, it is virtually impossible to separate the paramilitaries from the state.

What makes this state-sanctioned violence significant to the discussion at hand is not that it is so ubiquitous or that it is so extreme, but that it is used to exclude the political left and other marginalized groups from the political process. Political exclusion is its purpose and the political left is its target. It is not FARC or other leftist guerrillas – the stated enemy – that have been most affected by state violence. Rather, it is the poor, civil society organizations, trade unions, human rights defenders and other vulnerable groups – broadly speaking, the political left. Nor is this the inevitable result of vulnerable civilians being caught between the guerrilla and the state, a mere case of collateral damage. Rather, these groups have been deliberately targeted for their real or supposed political leanings. Any serious examination of the counter-insurgency war makes this clear.

Training manuals used by the US Army, Special Forces, Central Intelligence Agency and other institutions to train Colombian military officers (at, for example, the School of the Americas) characterize civil society as inherently subversive, and portray civil society organizations as FARC sympathizers. They

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<sup>171</sup> “Terror Trade Times,” *Amnesty International*.

<sup>172</sup> Taussig, *Law in a Lawless Land*, xi-xiii, 201.

<sup>173</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 52.

<sup>174</sup> Peceny and Durnan, “The FARC’s Best Friend”, 95-116.

define as "subversive" any organizations that encourage "immediate social, political, or economic reform."<sup>175</sup> According to these documents, a guerrilla presence may be indicated by such innocent acts as:

Refusal of peasants to pay rent, taxes or loan payments... Characterization of the armed forces as the enemy of the people... Appearance of many new members in established organizations such as labor organizations...Initiation of letter writing campaigns to newspapers and government officials deploring undesirable conditions and blaming individuals in power.<sup>176</sup>

As Doug Stokes notes in *America's Other War: Terrorizing Colombia*, "activities considered indications of subversion were actually practices otherwise considered normal elements of the democratic process within liberal democracies."<sup>177</sup> Nevertheless, the Colombian military makes a practice of deliberately targeting civil society groups that engage in them.<sup>178</sup>

Labour movements are considered inherently subversive, and the military has been used to contain union activism. In 1990, when negotiations between the Cerrejon mine and the Colombian mineworkers' union failed, 800 armed soldiers and a tank unit occupied the mine and forced the strikers to return to work.<sup>179</sup> Paramilitary violence has also been used to exclude leftist parties, including the ill-fated UP party, from the electoral process. In 1990, UP presidential candidate Bernardo Jaramillo was assassinated and was never replaced owing to security concerns. Thousands of UP members were killed and "disappeared" throughout the following decade. Unsurprisingly, the party fractured, losing two-thirds of its national council members to resignations before losing legal recognition as a party in 2002. In 1996, members of the leftist parties PRT, EPL and CRS in Sucre were killed. In 1997, all of PRT's candidates in local and provincial elections were murdered and not replaced. That same year, CRS withdrew candidates from races in three provinces due to death threats and killings.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 63-67.

<sup>176</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 65.

<sup>177</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 65-66.

<sup>178</sup> Stokes, *America's Other War*, 65-66.

<sup>179</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 65.

<sup>180</sup> Wilson and Carroll, "The Colombian Contradiction".

Associating rather benign non-violent and democratic political and labour activism with guerrilla activity has made participation in the democratic process inherently dangerous for anyone on the left. Anyone critical of the Colombian government is liable to be labeled an “enemy” and targeted as part of the counter-insurgency war. In this climate of extreme state violence, there remains virtually no room for non-violent political protest, dissent or opposition. In 2005, much of the “legal” left in Colombia united to form the Polo Democrático Alternativo (PDA), which won 4 representative seats, 11 senate seats and 10% of the vote in the 2006 legislative elections. The PDA presidential candidate, Carlos Gaviria, came second in the presidential race with over 22% of the national vote, a historic high for the left in Colombia. In an ugly case of history repeating itself, however, the leadership received death threats and PDA members were assassinated.<sup>181</sup> Surely, the very real risk of death that attends participation in the electoral process helps explain the lack of a robust political left in Colombia.

The left in Colombia remains extremely weak, and Colombia has yet to elect a leftist government since the end of the Cold War. Some, including Wilson and Carroll in “The Colombian Contradiction”, attribute this phenomenon to the persistence of armed conflict and guerrilla forces:

The guerrilla’s strong presence fueled many upper- and middle-class Colombians’ fears and has allowed the ‘guerrilla terrorist’ label to be applied freely to leftist political parties building support for right-wing solutions...in other South American countries...the lack of threat from insurgencies...facilitated peaceful reform.<sup>182</sup>

Indeed, the press routinely labels members of the PDA as “camouflaged communists”, “guerrilla terrorists” and “guerrilla auxiliaries”. Further, the most successful leftist parties in Colombia count the fewest former guerrillas among their members.<sup>183</sup> And yet, this argument would be more convincing were it not for the shocking amount of state violence directed at the whole of the political left in Colombia, not just former guerrillas. Such extreme state violence seems to suggest

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<sup>181</sup> Wilson and Carroll, “The Colombian Contradiction”.

<sup>182</sup> Wilson and Carroll, “The Colombian Contradiction”, 98.

<sup>183</sup> Wilson and Carroll, “The Colombian Contradiction”.

that there is more to the left's electoral failures than the distaste or fears of the middle class.

Political violence was particularly alarming during the presidency of Alvaro Uribe, from 2002 to 2010. As Amnesty International highlighted in a 2003 report,

Under the [Uribe] government, human rights activists were killed, "disappeared", detained, threatened and harassed. While expressing an interest in maintaining dialogue with non-governmental organizations, in practice officials and some sectors of the media frequently treated human rights defenders as subversives, targeting them during intelligence and counter-insurgency operations.<sup>184</sup>

In 2003, eighty Colombian NGOs issued a joint report condemning the dramatic increase in extrajudicial executions, disappearances, torture and arbitrary detentions during his tenure. Importantly, the report asserted that "indiscriminate military operations" had been carried out for the purpose of "social control and to implant terror in the population."<sup>185</sup>

Any examination of state violence in Colombia would not be complete without a discussion of aerial coca fumigation. It is an excellent illustration of how growing poverty and inequality, in combination with state violence, directly impacted the growth of FARC in the post-Cold War era. Aerial fumigation – whereby large swathes of rainforest and farmland are aerially sprayed with a combination of glyphosate and other chemicals – was adopted to combat coca cultivation.<sup>186</sup> Under pressure from the United States, the Colombian government dramatically expanded the aerial fumigation program in the 1990s. More fields were fumigated in 1994 than in the previous four years combined. In 1995, almost 25 000 hectares of coca, or roughly one third of the national crop, was eradicated.<sup>187</sup> By 2006, aerial fumigation had increased a further forty times over.<sup>188</sup>

While the practice may seem innocuous, it is not. Glyphosate is a toxic herbicide, and residents in the spray zones report being frequently exposed to the

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<sup>184</sup> "Colombia", *Amnesty International*.

<sup>185</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 54.

<sup>186</sup> P. L. Delamater and J. P. Messina, "Defoliation and the War on Drugs in Putumayo, Colombia," *International Journal of Remote Sensing* 27 (2006): 121-128.

<sup>187</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

<sup>188</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 59.

spray mixture. They complain of adverse health effects, which were confirmed by emergency health services and clinics in the spray zones. Concerns have also been raised about the impact of spraying on the tropical ecosystems of Amazonia. Health and environmental concerns have been dismissed or downplayed by the government, which insists that the spray mixture is relatively benign. However, there was little environmental regulation, protection or oversight of fumigation in the program's early years, and no rigorous health monitoring or studies of the impacts of spraying have been conducted.<sup>189</sup>

Additionally, aerial fumigation threatens the livelihoods of rural Colombians. Coca cultivation increased dramatically in the 1990s, due in no small part to neoliberal economic reforms (as we have seen). By the mid-1990s, hundreds of thousands of Colombian peasants had become coca growers or were otherwise employed in the industry. In addition to destroying the illicit coca crops that growers relied on to earn a living, aerial spraying proved to be rather indiscriminate and often ruined legal crops as well.<sup>190</sup> Destruction of export cash crops, as well as staple and subsistence food crops, resulted in widespread hunger.<sup>191</sup> According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, fumigation forced the mass displacement of Colombians from coca-growing areas.<sup>192</sup> In a very real sense, aerial coca fumigation is a form of both physical and economic violence.

It is no surprise, then, that coca fumigation proved to be exceedingly unpopular among rural Colombians. In 1996, for example, more than 200 000 *campesino cocaleros* in Putumayo, Caquetá, Guaviare and Cauca marched to the department capitals to protest the program. The protests included women and children, but nevertheless were often met with violent repression.<sup>193</sup>

FARC activity increased over the same period and many observers agree that coca eradication was at least partly responsible.<sup>194</sup> One department-level analysis of the relationship between coca production and violence in Colombia

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<sup>189</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 59-61, 91.

<sup>190</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

<sup>191</sup> Delamater and Messina, "Defoliation and the War on Drugs in Putumayo".

<sup>192</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 59-61, 91.

<sup>193</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 1, 11.

<sup>194</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

found that, contrary to conventional wisdom, escalated guerrilla activity did not correlate with coca *production* but, rather, showed a “significant and positive” relationship with coca *eradication*.<sup>195</sup> By first threatening *campesino*’s livelihoods with fumigation, and then responding to the resulting public outcry with violence, the Colombian government generated support for FARC in rural communities. According to Peter Calvert:

...neither the FARC nor the ELN have any difficulty recruiting supporters. The main reason is the US-sponsored coca-eradication programme, which is deeply unpopular among the Colombian peasantry and which has generated all-out resistance...<sup>196</sup>

Another observer noted that *campesinos*, “view the guerrillas as the only response to the attack on their lives and livelihood through aerial fumigation of coca and poppy fields...”<sup>197</sup> One author researching the *cocalero* movement found that FARC and other guerrillas have been embraced by Colombia’s rural poor,

...due to their support for longstanding but unfulfilled demands on the state for protection, land, credit, access to markets, and social services. FARC displayed impressive local power and authority, maintaining order in Putumayo and other parts of the Amazon by enacting laws and norms backed up by strict sanctions.<sup>198</sup>

In the words of one *campesino* in Western Amazonia,

After the [paramilitaries], FARC arrived and imposed order. They got it right, I mean everything. No more payment in bazuco, no more gun thugs, no more [paras] stealing chickens. Now you can go to your fields or wherever and nobody will steal anything. They’ve been struggling with this for a whole year. Everyone here has adjusted to this new situation and we’ve been very happy, very content. The guerrillas are real men.<sup>199</sup>

Of course, not all rural Colombians dissatisfied with aerial fumigation have, or will, turn to FARC for justice. Indeed, some of FARC’s other activities (including attempts to suppress civil society groups) have alienated many potential supporters. Nevertheless, FARC’s membership continued to grow throughout western

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<sup>195</sup> Jennifer Holmes, Sheila Amin Gutiérrez de Pineres and Kevin Curtin, “Drugs, Violence and Development in Colombia: A Department-Level Analysis,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 48 (2006): 157-184.

<sup>196</sup> Calvert, “Guerrilla Movements”.

<sup>197</sup> Peceny and Durnan, “The FARC’s Best Friend”, 95-116.

<sup>198</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 50.

<sup>199</sup> Ramirez, *Between the Guerrillas and the State*, 50.

Amazonia during times of intense aerial spraying.<sup>200</sup> It seems clear that, as the fumigation saga illustrates, a combination of growing poverty and state violence has a direct, positive relationship to FARC's recruiting success and growing public support.

Plan Patriota, a counter-insurgency operation launched in 2004, is another illustration of how increasing state violence has promoted FARC's recent growth. Under Plan Patriota, the Colombian military, in cooperation with American and private sector combat forces, targeted civilians with a "scorched-earth campaign" to undermine FARC's support base in rural areas (a strategy called "draining the sea"). The campaign was concentrated in the southern departments of Putumayo, Caquetá, Nariño and Meta. Civilians in these areas reported that Colombian forces led violent attacks against unarmed civilians. These orders were apparently issued from as high on the chain of command as General Reinaldo Castellanos. That the civilian population, rather than the guerillas themselves, were the intended target of these attacks was made clear by the former general of US Southern Command, James Hill, who admitted that the campaign targeted "suspected rebel-extended *regions*" and "rural areas where local peasant farmers support the FARC."<sup>201</sup>

While official reports touted the success of Plan Patriota and the imminent demise of FARC, these abuses against the peasantry served only to increase support for FARC. Over the course of that year, FARC dramatically expanded its combat forces. In December 2004 alone, FARC recruited one hundred members in a single municipality. In early 2005, FARC launched a counter-offensive at a major military installation described as "the worst two-day period for the armed forces since President Uribe took office." Smaller tactical operations followed, with the FARC's Eastern Block alone averaging one major attack per day and exacting over 450 enemy casualties in a single month. While Plan Patriota succeeded in forcing FARC into a temporary tactical withdrawal, FARC emerged from the operation with greater civilian support and greater numbers.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Peceny and Durnan, "The FARC's Best Friend", 95-116.

<sup>201</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia," 27-30.

<sup>202</sup> Brittain, "The FARC-EP in Colombia," 27-30.



Subsequently, in 2005, FARC shifted decisively from its traditional tactic of small-scale, intermittent assaults to large-scale and continuous direct confrontation with Colombian state forces. FARC since carried out a number of spectacular and successful attacks on corporate and state infrastructure, eliminating entire military battalions in the process. In 2007, guerrillas bombed an oil pipeline in Arauca (owned by Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum) a record 170 times, shutting it down for 240 days and costing the company \$100 million in lost earnings.<sup>203</sup> In the first week of May 2008, FARC carried out a coordinated series of attacks that isolated Colombia's largest oil pipeline and halted production of up to three million barrels of oil. Simultaneously, a second front in Norte de Santander seized the Cano-Limon pipeline. In response, General Paulino Coronado coordinated an offensive to free the pipeline and resume oil production, but FARC quickly eliminated the deployed battalion and continued the assault for several more days. One month later, FARC targeted a coal supply train, derailing about 40 wagons carrying over 100 tons of coal. While officials tried to downplay the seriousness of the damage, international wire services reported that the assault considerably hampered trade by destabilizing entire export routes. That same year, FARC celebrated its 44<sup>th</sup> anniversary by assaulting the Cerrejón coal mine.<sup>204</sup>

### **3.6 Neo-liberal Reform and State Violence in Partnership**

It should be recognized that neo-liberal reform and escalating state violence are not independent phenomena. Rather, state violence is intimately tied to the protection and promotion of neo-liberal reforms in Colombia. It is no coincidence that political violence peaked at a time when the impacts of neo-liberal reforms were also deepening. Indeed, the purpose of state violence – like the stepped-up “social control” so characteristic of the Uribe administration – is, in essence, to overcome democratic objections to unpopular neo-liberal reforms through the use of coercive force.

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<sup>203</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 58.

<sup>204</sup> Brittain, "Continuity of FARC-EP Resistance in Colombia."

In 1999 the United States tripled military aid to Colombia under the auspices of various counter-narcotics and counter-insurgency programs.<sup>205</sup> Despite the cover of the ongoing drug war and, later, the War on Terror<sup>206</sup>, it “became apparent that the U.S. government intended to use its war on drugs as a conduit for militarily implementing neo-liberalism in Colombia.”<sup>207</sup> Then U.S. Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson confirmed as much when he said, “the United States and its allies will invest millions of dollars in two areas of the Colombian economy, in the areas of mining and energy, and *to secure these investments* we are tripling military aid to Colombia.”[emphasis mine]<sup>208</sup>

The relationship between neo-liberalism and state violence is evident in the fact that state violence is disproportionately common in mining areas and oil-rich regions of the country. Plan Colombia, an American counter-narcotics operation, focused on the oil-rich department of Putumayo. During the Bush Administration, operations conducted under the guise of the War on Terror focused on the oil-rich department of Arauca. In both cases, the operational objective was to protect foreign companies that had invested in Colombia in the wake of recent neo-liberal reforms. Lieutenant Colonel Francisco Javier Cruz, who commanded troops in Putumayo, made this clear when he said in 2004, “Security is the most important thing to me. Oil companies need to work without worrying and international investors need to feel calm.”<sup>209</sup> Violence in these regions is staggering. Between 1995 and 2002, 433 massacres were reported in mining municipalities in Colombia. In combination with individual assassinations, they resulted in over 6600 deaths.

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<sup>205</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 53.

<sup>206</sup> See e.g. Stokes, *America's Other War*, 106. FARC and other guerilla factions in Colombia have been accused of links to Islamic fundamentalists and international terrorist networks. Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, former American Attorney General John Ashcroft designated FARC as the “most dangerous international terrorist group based in the Western Hemisphere,” and former Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Rand Beers, alleged that, “it is believed that FARC terrorists have received training in Al Qaeda terrorist camps in Afghanistan.” He later admitted that this sworn statement was a lie. FARC maintains no ties, whether ideological, financial or otherwise, with Islamic fundamentalists.

<sup>207</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 53.

<sup>208</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 53.

<sup>209</sup> Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 58.

Indeed, almost 70% of Colombia's displaced persons have been displaced from mining regions.<sup>210</sup>

### **3.7 Conclusions and Prospects for the Future**

Both anti-democratic laws and extreme violence meted out by the state have excluded the left from the political process both locally and at the national level, where it has been unable to elect a critical mass of representatives.<sup>211</sup> This is in stark contrast to much of Latin America, where popular dissatisfaction with neo-liberal reforms has propelled the rise of leftist governments and the left has come to dominate the political scene in the post-Cold War era. Jorge Castañeda, author of the seminal work *Utopia Unarmed*, and widely considered the foremost analyst of the Latin American left, recently noted that:

The combination of secular poverty and inequality and full-fledged representative democracy would inevitably bring to power governments seeking to govern on behalf of the poor and dispossessed...*Under conditions of democracy*, the left thrived electorally, winning or showing with remarkable consistency and simultaneity...The convergence of democracy and inequality was unbeatable, as it had been in Western Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: the left won more and more frequently.<sup>212</sup>

Surely it is fair to conclude that in Colombia it is a lack of genuine democracy – that is, the political exclusion of the left and marginalized groups, often through violent means – in combination with popular dissatisfaction with neo-liberal reforms, which lead to FARC's remarkable growth in the post-Cold War era. Sorely pressed by an untenable economic reality, and without legitimate means of participating in their own governance, many Colombians turned to the only other available option: armed struggle.

Reports of the decline and imminent defeat of FARC are not new. As early as 1973, when the joint American-Colombian campaign Operation Anorí destroyed much of FARC's leadership and left as few as 150 guerillas in the field, the

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<sup>210</sup> Francisco Ramirez Cuellar, *The Profits of Extermination: How U.S. Corporate Power is Destroying Colombia*, (Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 2005), 85-86 in Gibbs and Leech, *The Failure of Global Capitalism*, 59.

<sup>211</sup> Wilson and Carroll, "The Colombian Contradiction", 83.

<sup>212</sup> Castañeda, "Where Do We Go From Here?" In *Leftovers*, 233-234.

Colombian government was quick to pronounce FARC dead. Of course, the declaration of victory was premature and FARC rebounded in a few years. Between 1998 and 2006, despite numerous counter-insurgency campaigns backed by aggressive cheerleading in the media, victory over FARC was never realized. Far from declining, during this period FARC experienced a significant increase in membership and in military capability. A series of high-profile attacks eventually silenced both American and Colombian officials. In 2008, Interior Minister Carlos Holguin was finally moved to say, "Colombia should not dream or come close to proclaiming a victory."<sup>213</sup>

FARC suffered two significant set-backs in spring 2008. Commander-in-Chief Marulanda died, and two of FARC's highest-ranking, most recognizable leaders, Commandante Raúl Reyes and Iván Ríos, were killed. Again, the Colombian media was quick to suggest that a combination of desertion, military defeats and infiltrators could destroy a group "once thought invincible". Even Hugo Chávez opined that the era of guerrilla warfare had passed.<sup>214</sup> However, the Uribe Administration was found to have actively under-represented statistics and information related to the war and security. Official estimates wildly diverge from the estimates of scholars and military analysts. The former director of Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics, Cesar Caballeros, admitted that the government had manipulated statistics "to make Colombia appear safer than it is, casting doubt on achievements that have made [Uribe] popular both at home and with the U.S. government." In this context, one can be doubly certain that reports of FARC's supposed disintegration are suspect.<sup>215</sup> The Colombian military now claims that, as of 2014, FARC fields only about 8 000 fighters, down from a high of 16 000 in 2001.<sup>216</sup>

FARC is now engaged in peace talks with the Colombian government. Informal discussions with President Juan Manuel Santos began shortly after he took office in August 2010, followed by exploratory talks in Havana and formal

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<sup>213</sup> Brittain, "Continuity of FARC-EP Resistance in Colombia."

<sup>214</sup> Brittain, "Continuity of FARC-EP Resistance in Colombia."

<sup>215</sup> Brittain, "Continuity of FARC-EP Resistance in Colombia."

<sup>216</sup> "Q&A: Colombia Peace Talks", *BBC News Latin America and Caribbean* 13 June 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19875363>.

negotiations in Oslo in 2012. The six-point agenda includes land reform, political participation, drug trafficking, victims' rights, disarmament and implementation of the peace deal. However, the agreement to negotiate does not include a ceasefire. Military operations are expected to continue until a final deal is reached. President Santos had hoped for a significant agreement by late 2013, but has now revised his timetable, hoping for some progress by the end of 2014.<sup>217</sup>

The Colombian public widely supports the peace process and is optimistic about the outcome. Santos' re-election in 2014 was regarded as a successful referendum on the peace-process. However, negotiations have proceeded much more slowly than originally envisioned. And, while key agreements have been reached on land reform, the agenda is notably more modest than in previous peace talks, lacking the radical changes to Colombia's political and economic model that FARC has long argued for.<sup>218</sup> Further, Santos was defense minister in former President Uribe's administration, overseeing some of Colombia's worst human rights scandals, and leads a centre-right coalition (his chief political rival, Óscar Iván Zuluaga, is a hard right militarist candidate backed by Uribe). Human rights activists continue to be murdered and jailed in startling numbers, and according to Amnesty International, "human rights violations and abuses continue unabated."<sup>219</sup> In the absence a radical political and economic transformation, whatever agreements are reached may prove inadequate to mollify FARC supporters. And, if the past repeats itself and negotiations are interrupted by violent reprisals, the peace talks may prove short-lived.

FARC has proven remarkably resilient in its four decades of existence. As long as it remains one of the few credible alternatives to Colombia's ruling elite, and the Colombian government fails to adequately address the poverty and violence that motivate FARC supporters and recruits, FARC may continue to survive and thrive in the era of neo-liberal globalization.

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<sup>217</sup> See e.g. "Q&A: Colombia Peace Talks", *BBC News*. See also the official website of the Peace Delegation of the FARC-EP, <http://farc-epeace.org>.

<sup>218</sup> "Q&A: Colombia Peace Talks", *BBC News*; Ellie Mae O'Hagan, "Why Colombia's Left and the West Welcome a Rightwing President", *The Guardian* 17 June 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/17/colombia-left-west-welcome-santos-rightwing-victory>.

<sup>219</sup> O'Hagan, "Why Colombia's Left and the West Welcome a Rightwing President".

## **CHAPTER 4: THE NAXALITE-MAOIST INSURGENCY**

### **4.1 History Until 1990**

The Indian subcontinent is vast, its peoples linguistically, religiously and culturally diverse. The Mughal Empire, which ruled over most of what we now call India from the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, was the first power to achieve anything resembling unified political control over the region. As a small and less-than-united ruling elite in an alien land, the Mughals were forced to develop a strong, complex bureaucracy to rule effectively. The Mughal Empire declined in the eighteenth century and was supplanted by the British Empire, which rose to supreme power in the region between 1740 and 1860. The British closely imitated the Mughals' governance strategies, and moved to standardize law and policy and develop a nation-wide economic strategy. British rule quashed old regional conflicts but also brought an end to local political and economic evolution by upholding imperial forms of rule.<sup>220</sup>

In the twentieth century, the colonial regime introduced new laws and market rationales, and a modern bureaucracy and infrastructure. India also experienced a burgeoning of public institutions as well as organized mass struggles for social, political and economic rights. Independence from colonial rule was achieved in 1947, swiftly followed by the partitioning of the subcontinent (including, most dramatically and violently, the secession of Pakistan). This triumph was tempered, however, by a number of challenges. The new national government had inherited a society deeply divided along ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and caste lines, and soon found itself struggling to confront widespread poverty and deeply-rooted inequalities.<sup>221</sup>

India's early nationalist campaigners believed that poverty was inextricably linked to the siphoning of economic resources to Europe during the colonial period, a process that amounted to a continual, exhausting drain on the Indian economy. As a result, the national leadership was deeply suspicious of laissez-faire economics and free trade. Indeed, India's first prime minister and icon of the independence

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<sup>220</sup> Peter Robb, *A History of India*, second edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1-11.

<sup>221</sup> Robb, *A History of India*, 1-11.

movement, Jawaharlal Nehru, regarded international trade as a “whirlpool of economic imperialism”.<sup>222</sup> India thus turned inward after 1947, pursuing a policy of economic self-sufficiency and state-driven development called Nehruvian socialism. Led by the National Planning Commission, the early years of the post-independence period saw marked economic improvement, including a 50% expansion of industry by 1959, and large increases in agricultural output.<sup>223</sup> However, education, communication and electrical infrastructure did not improve sufficiently to meet the needs of India’s growing population, especially in rural areas.<sup>224</sup> Nehru’s performance in office received mixed reviews at best.

The Naxalite movement was born in the chaos of a country-wide agrarian crisis in 1967. While an unforeseen drought was officially blamed, the crisis was in fact the poisoned fruit of both India’s prevailing feudal system of land tenure and the government’s failure to successfully address rural poverty.<sup>225</sup> In 1967, much of India’s cultivated land was held by a small, wealthy minority in the form of large estates. Only 5% of rural households owned a total of 40% of India’s cultivated land, while almost 58% of rural households collectively owned or leased only 7% of total cultivated land.<sup>226</sup> Peasants were largely subsistence producers who could not generate marketable surplus. Large landowners often took advantage of general food scarcity to hoard their own surplus produce and sell it at inflated prices.<sup>227</sup>

The Indian government attempted to address this situation with a series of land and tenancy reforms, which failed spectacularly. First, the government attempted to abolish the zamindari regime, a Mughal-era system of land ownership that, among other things, allowed landlords to collect taxes from their tenants on behalf of the state. However, many large landowners were influential in the ruling Congress Party and in state governments, enabling them to de-claw the legislation to such an extent that zamindars retained most of their lands and privileges. The

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<sup>222</sup> Patrick French, *India: A Portrait* (London: Penguin, 2011), 148-151.

<sup>223</sup> Robb, *A History of India*, 222-226.

<sup>224</sup> Robb, *A History of India*, 222-226.

<sup>225</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, *India’s Simmering Revolution: The Naxalite Uprising* (London: Zed Books, 1984), 1-2. For discussion about the political and economic causes of famine, see Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (New York: The Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>226</sup> Banerjee, *India’s Simmering Revolution*, 2-3.

<sup>227</sup> Banerjee, *India’s Simmering Revolution*, 2-3.

only significant achievement was the abolishment of zamindars' ability to collect tax. Even this victory proved hollow since, in return for surrendering this privilege, zamindars received over Rs. 2 billion in compensation.<sup>228</sup>

The government also tried to enforce ceilings on the size of individual landholdings, with the goal of redistributing surplus land. However, the ceilings were kept relatively high, and the delay between the announcement of the reforms and their implementation allowed landlords to transfer land in excess of the proposed ceiling to relatives, effectively retaining the land for themselves. Ultimately, the surplus land accrued to the government was inconsequential. In the state of Andhra Pradesh, for example, the government expected to gain almost 75 000 acres, but was only able to acquire a laughable 191 acres total.<sup>229</sup> Tenancy reforms that aimed to regulate rents and provide tenants with some security also failed. Again, the long delay between announcement and implementation allowed landlords to preemptively evict their tenants *en masse*.<sup>230</sup>

The government also attempted to alleviate chronic food insecurity by introducing the New Agrarian Strategy in 1960. Better known as the "green revolution", this program amounted to an aggressive shift towards modern industrial agriculture through a package of new equipment and inputs, including hybrid seeds, pesticides and fertilizers. The government subsidized these inputs and extended inexpensive credit to farmers for investment in tractors, threshers and other machinery, and also invested heavily in dams, irrigation and other infrastructure.<sup>231</sup> Green revolution techniques and technologies were intended to improve production, but, once again, proved to do more harm than good. What gains were made in food grain output began to slow, owing to the fact that green revolution technologies obtained decreased returns over time, did not yield as well in less fertile regions, encouraged soil erosion and decreased groundwater levels. Simultaneously, chemical inputs, machinery and irrigation demanded continued costly investment. Comparatively large landholders profited, creating a new class

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<sup>228</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 7-8.

<sup>229</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 8-9.

<sup>230</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 8-9.

<sup>231</sup> Kathy Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India: Predatory Growth, Internal Colonization, and the Intensification of Class Struggle," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 35: 568-570.



of affluent “capitalist farmers”<sup>232</sup>, but small farmers were left with higher production costs, higher rents, and little improvement in real income. Mechanization on large farms also increased unemployment by displacing farm labourers. While the income of large landowners rose during this period, income and food security among small farmers and landless labourers actually declined.<sup>233</sup>

Facing rising costs and unable to earn sufficient income, many were forced to borrow money, but a bad credit market compounded their financial difficulties. Government agencies, cooperatives and banks provided only 7% of available credit in the rural market.<sup>234</sup> Private agencies and village moneylenders supplied the rest and often charged usurious interest rates of up to 50% per annum.<sup>235</sup> As a result, the rural workforce became massively indebted. By 1967, over 60% of labourer households in India were indebted.<sup>236</sup> Many were unable to pay their quickly escalating debts, forcing them to mortgage or sell their land. Others entered into a form of bonded slavery to their creditors.<sup>237</sup>

Thus, a vast population of landed peasants was transformed into a vast population of tenants and landless labourers. Between 1951 and 1971, the number of landless laborers in India rose from 31 million to 45 million.<sup>238</sup> Tenants’ lives were extremely precarious since their rights were not defined under law and their rents could be as high as 80% of their crop.<sup>239</sup> Landless laborers, meanwhile, earned extremely low wages and endured chronic underemployment (some might work only three months per year).<sup>240</sup>

By 1967, in spite of land reforms and agricultural modernization, rural India was blighted by extreme and worsening poverty. Employment opportunities were disappearing even as millions were driven from the land by a rising tide of debt.<sup>241</sup> Chronic food and employment insecurity left India especially vulnerable to an

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<sup>232</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 570-571.

<sup>233</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 10-11.

<sup>234</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>235</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>236</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>237</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>238</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>239</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>240</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 4-5.

<sup>241</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 23-24.

unexpected drought that year. Beginning in 1966, newspaper reports began to chronicle the horrors of steadily worsening malnutrition and starvation across India. According to government reports that year, almost 47 million people across 117 districts were affected by “scarcity conditions.”<sup>242</sup> By 1967, India faced a food shortage of 10 million tones.<sup>243</sup> One third of Bihar State was declared a famine area, the first ever declaration of famine since the end of colonial rule. Food riots broke out across the country.<sup>244</sup>

Enter the uprising at Naxalbari. The principle ideologue of the uprising was Charu Mazumdar, a disaffected member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI(M), working from Siliguri, West Bengal. Mazumdar accused CPI(M) of “betraying the cause of Indian revolution by choosing the path of parliamentarism and class collaboration.”<sup>245</sup> Mazumdar favored the principle of armed struggle. In his own words, “he who has not dipped his hand in the blood of class enemies can hardly be called a communist.”<sup>246</sup> He advocated the “Chinese model” developed by Chairman Mao (which involved arming the peasantry, establishing a base of support in the countryside, persisting in protracted armed struggle, and finally encircling and capturing cities).<sup>247</sup> Mazumdar's views quickly gained influence among the rural poor. By 1962, peasants across West Bengal were arming themselves. By 1967, Mazumdar and his followers were openly agitating against the ruling United Front government.<sup>248</sup>

Also that year, Kanu Sanyal, a member of CPI(M), and Jangal Santhal, a local tribal leader, held a peasants' conference in Darjeeling, West Bengal, where they called on the population to prepare for protracted armed resistance. Within months, 20 000 peasants across the state were enrolled in the party as full time activists.<sup>249</sup> Armed “peasants' committees” seized landholdings, murdered landlords and looted their guns, destroyed land records, cancelled debts, and

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<sup>242</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 1-3.

<sup>243</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 1-3.

<sup>244</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 1-3.

<sup>245</sup> Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, “The Road from Naxalbari,” *Frontline* vol. 22 i. 21: 8-21.

<sup>246</sup> William Thornton and Songok Han Thornton, “India in Search of Itself: The Crisis and Opportunity of Indo-Globalization,” *New Political Science* 31 (2009): 183.

<sup>247</sup> Ramakrishnan, “The Road from Naxalbari”, 8-21.

<sup>248</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 72-87.

<sup>249</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 84-87.

established parallel village governments. By May, a network of peasant committees held strongholds throughout Darjeeling district, including in Naxalbari, Kharibari and Phansidewa.<sup>250</sup>

After a policeman was killed in Naxalbari and police retaliated by firing on a crowd of villagers (killing nine women and children) violence in the region quickly escalated into open rebellion. Armed bands roamed the countryside collecting taxes and dispensing justice, and numerous murders and abductions were reported. The situation degenerated into what the West Bengal Chief Minister called a "reign of terror."<sup>251</sup> The rebellion came to an end in July when Jangal Santhal and several other leaders were arrested.<sup>252</sup>

Although the Naxalbari uprising lasted only a few months, it had far-reaching consequences for rural India and was a watershed moment for India's communist movement. While the CPI(M) leadership officially condemned the rebels, dissenters within the party demonstrated their support for the uprising, especially in the regions of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. The dissenters held a meeting several months after the uprising and established the All India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR). In May 1969, soon after the release of Kanu Sanyal, Jangal Santhal and other leaders of the rebellion, AICCCR separated from CPI(M), officially establishing the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), or CPI(M-L). At its first congress in 1970, Mazumdar was elected General Secretary.<sup>253</sup>

Despite widespread and severe police repression, CPI(M-L) cadres were able to establish a foothold in remote regions with the help of dalit (untouchable) and adivasi (tribal) villagers. First in the Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh, then in the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh, and the Bhojpur district of Bihar, the "Naxalite" militants began to establish parallel administrative bodies in the villages and assumed many government responsibilities.<sup>254</sup> During this period,

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<sup>250</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 84-87.

<sup>251</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 84-87.

<sup>252</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 84-87.

<sup>253</sup> Ramakrishnan, "The Road from Naxalbari", 8-21.

<sup>254</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 131-300.

Mazumdar acquired something of a cult status within the party, such that his arrest and subsequent death in police detention in July 1972 led to a virtual collapse of central authority in CPI(M-L).<sup>255</sup>

The next several decades were characterized by a number of schisms in the “Naxalite” movement, all driven by conflicting interpretations of the Maoist revolutionary line.<sup>256</sup> At one point there were as many as two-dozen Marxist guerrilla outfits operating in India, “all claiming to be the real inheritors of the legacy of Naxalbari.”<sup>257</sup> If any such group could be called CPI(M-L)'s immediate successor, it was probably the People's War Group (PWG).<sup>258</sup> PWG was founded by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, a former teacher and state committee member of CPI(M-L).<sup>259</sup>

PWG focused its efforts on establishing a base in Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh.<sup>260</sup> The Bastar district of Chhattisgarh, just north of Warangal, soon became the epicenter of the movement and proved to be an ideal base due to the thick jungle cover.<sup>261</sup> PWG went on to gain control of 15 000 square kilometres in Andhra Pradesh where it forcibly redistributed large amounts of land, a move backed by significant popular support. In some areas, including Warangal, PWG established a parallel government, held its own “peoples’ courts”, and collected taxes from local businesses and forest

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<sup>255</sup> Ramakrishnan, “The Road from Naxalbari”, 8-21.

<sup>256</sup> For more information on competing Naxalite factions see e.g. Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution* and Ramakrishnan, “The Road from Naxalbari”. Those groups more open to participating in elections and building a broad democratic front were dismissed as “revisionists” by staunch supporters of the armed struggle, who were, in turn, scorned as “left adventurers.”

<sup>257</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 286-300.

<sup>258</sup> Banerjee, *India's Simmering Revolution*, 286-300.

<sup>259</sup> “Kondapalli Seetharamaiah Dead,” *The Hindu*, 13 April 2002. Kondapalli Seetharamaiah was born to a middle-class farming family in Jonnavada village. He was attracted to the communist movement at an early age, and became the Secretary of the Krishna district unit of the Communist Party of India, which played a crucial role in the Telangana uprising. He left politics after the CPI split, and worked as a teacher in Warangal. While there, he attended a party conclave of CPI (M-L) in Guntur district that was addressed by Charu Mazumdar. He became a state committee member of CPI (M-L) and was associated with the Srikakulam movement. He founded the People’s War Group in 1980, and led the group successfully for a number of years as it grew. His years as a guerrilla included a number of arrests and a dramatic escape from custody that caused a media sensation. He left PWG in the 1990s following differences with the rest of the leadership. He spent his last years bedridden, suffering from Parkinson’s disease and heart problems. He died in his granddaughter’s house at the age of 87.

<sup>260</sup> Ramakrishnan, “The Road from Naxalbari”, 8-21.

<sup>261</sup> “Q&A: The Future of India’s Maoist Movement,” *The Wall Street Journal WSJ.com*, 14 July 2011.

contractors.<sup>262</sup> Seetharamaiah was replaced as General Secretary of the party by his close associate, alias Ganapathi, in 1991.<sup>263</sup>

Still, the Naxalite movement remained fragmented. Since its inception in 1980, PWG had tried to bring all other Naxalite outfits under its umbrella. As early as 1981, Seetharamaiah met with Kanai Chatterjee, his opposite number in the major splinter group Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), to discuss the possibility of a merger. However, differences over tactics and strategy, personality clashes, and a turf war over territory prevented talks from moving forward.<sup>264</sup> As late as 1998, armed clashes were still erupting between PWG and MCC. The guerrillas refer to this period as their “black chapter.”<sup>265</sup>

In 2000, however, hostility between different Naxalite factions declined. That year, MCC declared a unilateral ceasefire that was reciprocated by PWG. Merger talks were reopened and both groups jointly drafted a number of policy documents. The merger was officially announced on 14 October 2004 at a news conference in Hyderabad by PWG’s Andhra Pradesh State Secretary alias Ramakrishna. The new party was christened the Communist Party of India-Maoist (CPI-Maoist). PWG and MCC’s armed wings – the People’s Guerrilla Army and People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army, respectively – also merged at this time. They now operate jointly as the People’s Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA).<sup>266</sup> The merger was less the product of a desire within the movement for unity than it was of new external pressures that forced the movement to consolidate to survive. As one commentator noted, “only the social ravages of globalization could have brought about this remarkable merger.”<sup>267</sup> The merger not only allowed the movement to survive, but also gave the insurgency new teeth. Indeed, the Maoists’

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<sup>262</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 162.

<sup>263</sup> Rahul Pandita, “We Shall Certainly Defeat the Government” *Open Magazine* 17 October 2009. <http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/nation/we-shall-certainly-defeat-the-government>.

<sup>264</sup> “Communist Party of India-Maoist,” *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, Institute for Conflict Management. [www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/terrorist\\_outfits/CPI\\_M.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/terrorist_outfits/CPI_M.htm). Note that PWG did successfully merge with the state-level CPI-ML (Party Unity) of Bihar.

<sup>265</sup> Thornton, “India in Search of Itself”, 194.

<sup>266</sup> “Communist Party of India-Maoist”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>267</sup> Thornton, “India in Search of Itself”, 195.

recent successes compelled Prime Minister Singh to brand them India's "biggest internal security threat."<sup>268</sup>

The economic and political conditions which led to the Naxalite rebellion in the 1960s – poverty and political exclusion enforced by violence – would also lead to dramatic growth in the Maoist insurgency in the post-Cold War era.

## **4.2 Organization**

The Naxalite-Maoist insurgency has a well-developed organizational structure. The armed wing of the movement is organized into central, state and zonal commissions.<sup>269</sup> The lowest level of the hierarchy is the village-level militia, composed of new recruits. They are tasked with patrolling and protecting a handful of villages, as well as assisting villagers in day-to-day tasks such as laboring in the fields, repairing houses and digging wells.<sup>270</sup> The highest level of the hierarchy is the People's Liberation Guerilla Army (PLGA), the Maoists' most elite unit of professional soldiers. The PLGA is estimated to have 10 000 men and women in its ranks, all highly trained and well armed.<sup>271</sup> PLGA uses stolen police and army service weapons, AK rifles and self-loading rifles, light machine guns, carbines, .303s and landmines.<sup>272</sup> They also have a technical squad that assembles grenades and manufactures its own 12-bore guns and ammunition.<sup>273</sup> Apart from the PLGA is the Maoists' secondary or "base" force of soldiers, some of whom carry rudimentary or traditional weapons, including bows and arrows. In a typical operational formation of 200 Maoists, about 60 to 70 will be PLGA members, and the remainder will be from the secondary force.<sup>274</sup>

The Maoists' military success has rendered them the sole effective government across thousands of square kilometers, and left them burdened with responsibilities more suited to a civilian government. As a result, in addition to the military command structure, the Maoists established a political wing to better

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<sup>268</sup> Imran Garda, "Inside India's Red Corridor," *Al Jazeera English*, 20 Oct 2011.

<sup>269</sup> "Q&A: The Maoists of India," *Al Jazeera English*, 24 October 2011.

<sup>270</sup> Arundhati Roy, "Walking with the Comrades," *Outlook India*, 29 March 2010.

<sup>271</sup> "Q&A," *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>272</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>273</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>274</sup> "Q&A," *The Wall Street Journal*.

separate “mass work” and “military work”.<sup>275</sup> The political wing is governed by a Central Committee, and subordinate regional bureaus, zonal committees and district committees report to it.<sup>276</sup> In Dandakaranya<sup>277</sup> (roughly congruous with Bastar district, Chhattisgarh), for example, the Maoists administer an elaborate structure of *janatana sarkars* (“people’s governments”)<sup>278</sup> based on organizing principles from the Chinese revolution. Each *janatana sarkar* is elected by a cluster of villages representing between 500 and 5000 people. They each have nine departments, including defense, health and even public relations, and are responsible for development projects, including building irrigation ponds and water-harvesting structures. A group of *janatana sarkars* fall under an area committee, and three area committees compose a division. There are ten divisions in Dandakaranya alone.<sup>279</sup>

The Maoists also administer large and extremely influential “above-ground” civil society organizations. One such organization is *Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan* (KAMS), which advocates for women’s rights and campaigns against forced marriage and abduction, bigamy and domestic violence. KAMS members have also become a formidable force against police corruption and violence, often rallying in their hundreds or thousands to physically confront the police. With over 90 000 members, KAMS may well be the largest women’s organization in India.<sup>280</sup>

The Maoist leadership is aging, and mostly hails from upper-caste and landed families in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. The current General Secretary of the party’s Central Committee is Muppala Lakshma Rao, a former schoolteacher

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<sup>275</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

<sup>276</sup> “The Maoists of India,” *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>277</sup> *Dandakaranya* is a spiritually significant region in east-central India. It covers 92 000 square kilometres, and is roughly equivalent to the Bastar District of Chhattisgarh, though it also includes parts of Orissa, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. *Dandakaranya* translates from Sanskrit to “the jungle of punishment,” and is significant as the setting of many Hindu myths. According to the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, Rama, his wife Sita and his brother Lakshmana spent many years exiled here. The area is said to be demon-haunted. *Dandakaranya* is heavily forested and is now at the very heart of the “red corridor.”

<sup>278</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”. Maoists call the Indian state *looti sarkar*, or “the government that loots”.

<sup>279</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

<sup>280</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

from Andhra Pradesh with degrees in science and education. He is over 60 years old, bespeckled, soft-spoken, and a member of the Velama caste, the traditional feudal lords in Telangana. His most common alias is Ganapathi (used on his official Facebook profile), though his name changes according to where he moves and he has many more. Some know him simply as “G.S.”<sup>281</sup> Ganapathy, like the rest of the Maoist leadership, prefers to remain anonymous and rarely gives interviews.<sup>282</sup> While the leadership is largely of advanced age, the majority of new Maoist recruits are boys and girls in their late teens and early twenties.<sup>283</sup>

The majority of Maoist recruits also hail from dalit<sup>284</sup> and adivasi<sup>285</sup> communities. As “untouchables” outside the Hindu caste system<sup>286</sup>, dalits face

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<sup>281</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 163, 173.

<sup>282</sup> Rahul Pandita, “The Phantom who Fell,” *Open Magazine*, 3 Dec 2011. Other important leaders include Mallojula Koteswara Rao, alias Kishenji (killed in 2011), Prashant Bose alias Kishan Da, former chief of MCC, Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavraj, head of the Central Military Commission, central spokesperson Cherukurl Rajkumar alias Azad (killed in 2010), head of intelligence Patel Sudhakar Reddy alias Surya (killed in 2009) and Katakam Sudershan alias Anand, head of the Central Regional Bureau.

<sup>283</sup> Shubhranshu Choudhary, “In Naxal Heartland,” *Index on Censorship* 35 (4): 72.

<sup>284</sup> Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN. *Human Rights in India Status Report 2012*. New Delhi: Working Group on Human Rights, May 2012.

[www.wghr.org/pdf/Status%20report%202023.05%20version.pdf](http://www.wghr.org/pdf/Status%20report%202023.05%20version.pdf). *Dalit* (from the Sanskrit word for “suppressed” or “broken”) is a common term for those castes that are traditionally regarded as “untouchable” and that are now officially designated as Scheduled Castes. Dalits composed over 16% of India’s total population as of 2012, and are broadly distributed across all Indian states.

<sup>285</sup> Working Group on Human Rights, *India Status Report*, 119. *Adivasi*, meaning “indigenous”, is an umbrella term for hundreds of distinct ethnic groups said to comprise the aboriginal population of India. They are also referred to as “tribals” and many, but not all, are officially designated as Scheduled Tribes. India’s more than 84 million adivasis comprise over 8% of the total population, and are concentrated in the foothills of the north-east and the “tribal belt” stretching through central India. Adivasis have their own cultures and religions distinct from the Hindu majority. The term encompasses groups such as the *Asur* of Jharkhand and West Bengal (a small tribe which worships nature spirits and smelts iron), the *Kattunayakan* of Kerala and Tamil Nadu (who make a living gathering forest produce like honey), and the *Gonds* of central India, (a group several million strong with over one thousand years of recorded history).

<sup>286</sup> For more information on caste in India see e.g. Arthur Bonner et al. *Democracy in India: A Hollow Shell*. Washington: The American University Press, 1994 and Nicholas B. Dirks. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Caste is a complex phenomenon with a long, changing history. There is no room here to provide an exhaustive account of caste in India, but briefly, caste is a system of social stratification that separates society into endogamous groups of varying status. Caste was long considered by Western scholars to be an ancient indigenous practice intimately tied to Hinduism (the Brahminic Social Order was thought to compartmentalize all people into biological and metaphysical *jatis* of graded inequality). This rather Orientalist view was promulgated by Louis Dumont, among others, and defined the Western understanding of caste in India for much of the twentieth century. Contemporary research has challenged this approach. Nicholas Dirks has argued that caste as it exists today was constructed, or at least deliberately reinforced, by the British raj. In this view, caste is a modern phenomenon that, while not invented by the British, became a central organizing



acute social discrimination (including social and economic boycott), are often denied access to public services, and are largely relegated to lowest-wage employment. They are also victimized by routine and extreme violence, including murder, rape and arson by higher castes, as well as arbitrary arrest, torture and extrajudicial killings by police. Dalit women are frequently the target of sexualized violence.<sup>287</sup> Maoists appeal to dalits by condemning caste discrimination and acts of violence against dalit communities. They also advocate broader reforms in the agricultural sector, in which many dalits are marginally employed.<sup>288</sup> However, the Maoist movement is now dominated by adivasis, the minority indigenous peoples of India. Adivasis exist “at the bottom of all ladders – economic, social, cultural, and even psychological” and many live by clearing the jungle to cultivate subsistence crops.<sup>289</sup> As a result, they have been particularly victimized by neo-liberal reforms and by state violence throughout the post-independence period. Adivasis were at the centre of the Naxalbari uprising, and their fate has been inextricably linked with the Maoists ever since.<sup>290</sup>

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principle of Indian society under colonial rule, systematizing diverse forms of social identity, community and organization. What is undeniable is that caste was, and still is, regarded by a wide range of commentators, from Hegel and Weber to Ambedkar, Gandhi and Nehru, as fundamental to Indian civilization and culture. In the post-independence period, India’s political leadership did little to address the issues of caste lurking beneath the surface of Indian democracy. Mohandas Gandhi himself remained a staunch defender of the caste system. He wrote at length in defense of the *varna* system, describing it as a rational division of labour, and his views on caste only evolved “slowly, grudgingly, and, it often seemed, tactically.” In *Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru argued that “the caste system does not stand by itself; it is part, and an important part, of a much larger scheme of social organization. It may be possible to remove some of the obvious abuses and to lessen its rigidity and yet to leave the system intact.” Indeed, while efforts have been made to address caste discrimination through law and policy (with, for example, caste reservations in universities), caste discrimination and violence remain common. Caste remains ubiquitous and enormously influential in the twenty-first century. The authors of *Democracy in India: A Hollow Shell* argue that, “no other society has developed such a complex and sophisticated caste culture, linking religious and economic concerns into an ethos of dominance...the virus infects every religious, ethnic and social institution.” The last several decades have witnessed the rise of the *Hindutva* movement, which envisions a nation where the “Hindu way of life” dominates other religious traditions and displaces political ideologies in public life. *Hindutva* is the guiding philosophy of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

<sup>287</sup> Working Group on Human Rights, *India Status Report*, 119.

<sup>288</sup> “Resolution on the Killings of Dalits in Khairlanji,” CPI(Maoist): 9<sup>th</sup> Congress.

<sup>289</sup> Garda, “Inside India’s Red Corridor”.

<sup>290</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

Finally, almost half of Maoist cadres and well over half of Maoist commanders are women.<sup>291</sup> It is significant that so many women have joined the Maoist movement and embraced the hard, and extremely dangerous, life of the guerrilla. Gender discrimination and violence against women are extremely common in India.<sup>292</sup> However, the comparative frequency and severity of violence

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<sup>291</sup> Choudhary, "In Naxal Heartland", 72.

<sup>292</sup> See e.g. Helen Pidd, "Why is India so bad for women?" *The Guardian*, 23 July 2012. [www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/23/why-india-bad-for-women](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/23/why-india-bad-for-women); "Bridal Slaves." *Al Jazeera English*, 15 Nov 2011. [www.aljazeera.com/programmes/slaverya21stcenturyevil/2011/10/2011101013102368710.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/slaverya21stcenturyevil/2011/10/2011101013102368710.html); Polgreen, Lydia. "Rapes of Women Show Clash of Old and New India." *New York Times*, 26 March 2011. [www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/world/asia/27india.html?pagewanted=all&r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/27/world/asia/27india.html?pagewanted=all&r=0). Krishnan, Kavita. "Women Struggling Against Rape in India Find the Assange Case Hard to Digest." *HuffingtonPost.com*, 21 December 2010. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kavita-krishnan/women-struggling-against-rape-in-india-find-the-assange-case-hard-to-digest>; Simon Denyer, "India Gang Rape Prompts Tough New Laws on Sexual Assault", *The Guardian Weekly* 5 February 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/05/india-gang-rape-stricter-laws>. Amana Fontanella-Khan, "India's Feudal Rapists", *New York Times* 4 June 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/05/opinion/indias-feudal-rapists.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/05/opinion/indias-feudal-rapists.html?_r=1). "India State Minister on Rape: 'Sometimes It's Right, Sometimes It's Wrong'", *The Guardian* 5 June 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/05/india-state-minister-rape-crimes-comment>; "Indian Woman Gang-Raped at Police Station", *Al Jazeera English* 12 June 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/06/indian-woman-gang-raped-at-police-station-201461264312257829.html>; "Indian Police Investigate Alleged Station Gang Rape" *Al Jazeera America* 12 June 2014. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/12/india-woman-gangrape.html>. A series of high-profile gang rapes have recently shone a spotlight on the status of women in India. Especially prominent was the gang rape and murder of a young woman on a bus in Delhi in December 2012 that made international headlines and prompted the government to enact tougher sexual assault laws. Other lurid stories abound, including that of a man in Rajasthan who, in June 2012, beheaded his young daughter with a sword and paraded the bloody head around his village as a warning to other women against falling in love with lower-caste men. The next month in Baghpat, Uttar Pradesh, a group of village elders banned women from carrying mobile phones, choosing their own husbands and leaving their houses unaccompanied or with their heads uncovered. While these incidents are so extreme as to be considered newsworthy, violence and discrimination against women in India is widespread and often overlooked. Indeed, the challenges facing women in India today are so numerous that it would be impossible to fully catalogue them here. A survey conducted in June 2012 of 370 gender specialists worldwide, ranked India as the worst of all G20 countries in which to be a woman (a Thomson Reuters' poll ranked India as the fourth most dangerous country to be a woman *in the world*). As Gulshun Rehman, an advisor at Save the Children UK, noted, "In India, women and girls continue to be sold as chattels, married off as young as 10, burned alive as a result of dowry-related disputes and young girls exploited and abused as domestic slave labour." Violence against women, especially sexual violence, and sexual harassment are very common. Gender-selective abortion and female infanticide, child marriage, bride trafficking and bridal slavery are all very common (almost half of all Indian girls are married before the age of 18). Sexual harassment and violence are also normalized. In one survey, Indian women indicated that sexual harassment was "part of their everyday lives," and had become 'normal', while another indicated that 80% of women in New Delhi had been harassed or stalked. A Unicef study conducted in 2012 found that 52% of adolescent girls and 57% of adolescent boys in India think it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife. The vast majority of crimes against women go unreported (for example, senior police officials estimate that only 10% of rapes in the Delhi region are reported). Violence against women also appears to be on the rise. According to the National Crime Records

directed at poor, dalit, lower caste and adivasi women is, even against this backdrop, quite shocking. Rape is routinely used to intimidate and humiliate lower caste and adivasi women, and is also very common in police custody.<sup>293</sup> The Maoists recruit women members by speaking openly about the oppression of women, campaigning for women's rights through organizations like KAMS, and working to break down the gender barriers that are still ubiquitous in rural India.<sup>294</sup> Their "peoples' courts" have also gained a reputation for giving justice to women victimized by sexual violence.<sup>295</sup>

The Maoists raise funds to cover their operating costs largely through "taxation" in the form of extortion. They collect protection money from traders, industrialists, and public works contractors operating in their area of influence, especially those involved in timber extraction and other forest produce harvesting.<sup>296</sup> Seized internal documents produced by the Maoists in 2008 indicate that their income and operating budget are in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Other digital files seized from a Central Committee member indicated that the Maoists raised Rs. 10 billion (US\$ 200 million) in 2007 alone.<sup>297</sup>

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Bureau, there was a 7% overall increase in crimes against women between 2010 and 2011, (including an almost 20% increase in abductions and almost 10% increase in rape). Violence against women occurs against a backdrop of "moral policing", which places blame for violence on women and seeks to curtail their activities outside the home. The attitude of India's political leadership is often decidedly unhelpful. Mamta Sharma, chair of the National Commission of Women, attributed violence against women, at least in part, to an erosion of traditional values, and admonished women to dress more carefully to avoid assaults. The former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court suggested that rape charges could be dropped if a rapist agreed to marry his victim. Babulal Gaur, the BJP home minister responsible for law and order in Madhya Pradesh, recently opined of rape that "sometimes it's right, sometimes it's wrong". The government and institutions of law seem unwilling or unable to address the crisis of violence against women in India. In July 2012, a vicious sexual assault in Guwahati, Assam was filmed and later broadcast with commentary on national television. Speaking of the incident, a columnist with Hindustan Times argued that, "this is a story of...disintegrating public governance when it comes to women. Men abuse women in every society, but few males do it with as much impunity, violence and regularity as the Indian male." One newscaster on NDTV agreed, saying, "We have a woman president, we've had a woman prime minister. Yet in 2012, one of the greatest tragedies in our country is that women are on their own when it comes to their own safety... And as far as the law is concerned: who cares?"

<sup>293</sup> Kavita Krishnan, "Women Struggling Against Rape in India Find the Assange Case Hard to Digest." *HuffingtonPost.com*, 21 December 2010.

<sup>294</sup> See e.g. Choudhary, "In Naxal Heartland", 72; Roy, "Walking with the Comrades"; French, *India: A Portrait*, 168.

<sup>295</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 171.

<sup>296</sup> "The Maoists of India," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>297</sup> "The Maoists of India," *Al Jazeera*.

The Maoists have been criticized for following an “outmoded ideology” or are accused of being little more than “bandits” and “extortionists” with no theoretical program to speak of.<sup>298</sup> This latter criticism, at least, appears groundless. The Maoists have developed a comprehensive theoretical and strategic program. Their literature is extensive and includes a party platform, many policy documents, and critical commentary on domestic and international events. They regularly issue press releases updating the public on the progress of the revolution.

Prior to the merger, PWG adhered to a Marxist-Leninist program, while MCC embraced the Maoist line. Since the merger, Maoism has come to prevail in the united party. It is regarded, in the words of comrade Ramakrishna, as “the higher stage of the Marxist-Leninist philosophy.”<sup>299</sup> Comrades Ganapathi and Kishan outlined the objectives of the united party in a press statement:

The immediate aim and programme of the Maoist party is to carry on and complete the already ongoing and advancing New Democratic Revolution in India, as part of the world proletarian revolution by overthrowing the semi-colonial, semi-feudal system under the neo-colonial form of indirect rule, exploitation and control...This revolution will be carried out and completed through armed agrarian revolutionary war...Hence the countryside as well as the Protracted People’s War will remain as the ‘center of gravity’ of the party’s work, while urban work will be complimentary to it.<sup>300</sup>

Marxism-Leninism-Maoism forms the ideological basis guiding the Maoists’ thinking in all activities and spheres.<sup>301</sup>

The Maoists officially defined their policy and objectives, in detail, in a series of documents released by the united party in 2004. One document, *Party Programme*, outlines the party’s general line and political platform to the rank and file. The Programme dismisses Indian democracy as “fraudulent” and disavows independence as “fake in essence...[a] semi-colonial and semi-feudal system under the neo-colonial form of indirect imperialist rule, exploitation and control”.<sup>302</sup> It

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<sup>298</sup> “A Spectre Haunting India,” *The Economist*, 17 August 2006.

<http://www.economist.com/node/7799247>.

<sup>299</sup> “Communist Party of India-Maoist”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>300</sup> “Communist Party of India-Maoist”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>301</sup> “Communist Party of India-Maoist”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>302</sup> “Party Programme”, Central Committee (P) Communist Party of India (Maoist), 21 September 2004, 10.

alleges that agents of imperialism (the American variety), the IMF and the World Bank control the Indian government and key sectors of the Indian economy. It derides the Congress Party as an imperialist ploy to derail national liberation, and goes on to accuse the bureaucracy and judiciary of corruption, and of using the army, state police and paramilitary forces to suppress popular protest and political opposition with violence.<sup>303</sup>

The Programme also denounces a wide range of institutions and practices that the Maoists consider responsible for many of India's social ills. It condemns feudal landlords and religious institutions for perpetuating caste discrimination and superstition, as well as "medieval oppression" of dalits, adivasis, women and religious minorities, especially Muslims. It singles out the modern agricultural practices of the green revolution for impoverishing small farmers and rural labourers, and laments the environmental impact of recent industrialization. It is also critical of "Indian expansionism", that is, colonialism *within* India's borders, and describes the modern Indian state as a "prison-house of nationalities".<sup>304</sup>

The Programme tackles the unique problems faced by dalits and adivasis. It acknowledges dalit concerns about caste discrimination, violence, and low-wage employment and dismisses the government's response as insufficient. It frames the dalit issue as fundamentally a class issue, decries untouchability as an "inhuman practice" and calls for complete abolishment of the caste system. It also identifies adivasis as "the most suppressed and repressed sections of Indian society", observing that many adivasi communities have been deprived of their land and livelihoods by land seizures and harassment.<sup>305</sup>

However, the *Party Programme* is disappointingly light on actionable policy proposals or reforms that can be implemented under India's existing democratic structure. Rather, the Programme envisions a perfected people's

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<sup>303</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 11, 7, 16.

<sup>304</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 13, 21, 14-16.

<sup>305</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 19-21. See also "Resolution on the Killings of Dalits in Khairlanji," CPI(Maoist): 9<sup>th</sup> Congress. The Maoists' 9<sup>th</sup> Congress also addressed violence against dalit families in a Special Resolution. Decrying the assault and murder of a dalit family in Khairlanji, Maharashtra as "a shame for humanity" and condemning local police and politicians for colluding with the perpetrators, they called on dalits to join the armed struggle as the only means of achieving liberation.

democratic state rising from the dust of a protracted liberation war.<sup>306</sup> Agriculture would be the foundation of the revolutionary state's new economy. The people's democratic state would confiscate all land belonging to landlords and to religious institutions and redistribute it among the landless poor and agricultural labourers. Growth in the agricultural sector would be encouraged by promoting cooperatives and ensuring higher prices for agricultural products, waiving the debts of small farmers and restoring agricultural subsidies, as well as investing in irrigation and other public projects. All banks, business enterprises and properties of both "imperialist capital" and of India's "comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie" would also be confiscated, and the revolutionary government would administer all monopoly industries and trade.<sup>307</sup>

The revolutionary state would also work to improve public services and working conditions. It would, among other things, enforce an eight-hour workday, increase wage rates, and abolish contract and child labour. The revolutionary government would enforce unemployment allowance and social insurance, introduce universal medical care, provide social security for the disabled and the elderly, and abrogate all the personal debts of "the middle peasants and other toiling people."<sup>308</sup>

Moreover, the people's state would work to abolish caste discrimination, untouchability and the caste system as a whole, while providing affirmative action for the social advancement of oppressed castes. Autonomy for all adivasi communities would be guaranteed, and the state would work to eradicate all forms of religious fundamentalism and the persecution of religious minorities. Additionally, the state would guarantee equal pay and property rights for women, abolish all forms of discrimination against women, and "end male domination and patriarchy."<sup>309</sup> (The Maoists cannot be accused of being unambitious.)

The people's democratic state would be governed by elected revolutionary people's committees and people's governing councils, enjoy universal suffrage,

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<sup>306</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 33.

<sup>307</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 30-34.

<sup>308</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 30-34.

<sup>309</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 30-34.

and recognize the right to speech, assembly and collective bargaining. Finally, revolutionary government would recognize the right to self-determination, including the right to secession, of every nationality within India. The Maoists disavow expansionism, and promise to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India's neighbors. The new India would also nullify all "unequal" treaties and agreements with "imperialist" countries and, instead, act as a base to facilitate a global socialist revolution.<sup>310</sup> This is not an exhaustive account of the Maoists' policy platform. *Party Programme* is a lengthy document that reviews the general party line in much greater detail.<sup>311</sup>

Within the movement there was never any question of the primacy of armed struggle. All Naxalite factions shared a belief in the use of violence and the "annihilation of class enemies" as a means to an end. The Maoists fully reject participation in the electoral process and any engagement with India's existing government, which they deride as a "bourgeois democracy." They refuse to work with the Congress party or any other party, and are particularly infuriated by India's "mainstream" communist parties, including CPI and CPI(M).<sup>312</sup>

Since the merger, CPI-Maoist has reaffirmed its commitment to the classical Maoist "protracted people's war" which aims not at immediate tactical goals, but instead at undermining the state and effecting a complete seizure of power.<sup>313</sup> Indeed, the *Party Programme* rejects parliamentary democracy altogether and endorses armed struggle as the only means of achieving national liberation:

...no bourgeois democracy ever came into being here. Extreme backwardness, poverty and illiteracy along with uneven social, economic and political conditions continue to exist. In this back drop the parliamentary system is an outright fraud framed in the deceptive name of "biggest democracy in the world" whereas all institutions like parliament, legislative assemblies, executive councils (including the so-called panchayati raj) are a thin cover for the autocratic rule representing the dictatorship of comprador bureaucratic bourgeoisie and feudal classes

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<sup>310</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 30-34.

<sup>311</sup> Other important documents include "Political Resolution", "Strategy and Tactics of the Indian Revolution" and "Hold High the Bright Red Banner of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism". Although the Government of India has moved to suppress their publication, many of these documents can be accessed online at [www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/index.htm](http://www.bannedthought.net/India/CPI-Maoist-Docs/index.htm). See also the CPI-Maoist Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/maoistindia>.

<sup>312</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>313</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

subservient to imperialism...no viable solution of the fundamental problems of the people can be sought through using any parliamentary institution...the people's political power can be established and advanced only through the path of protracted people's war.<sup>314</sup>

One top commander encapsulated the Maoists' approach when, in responding to questions about the beheading of a policeman, he quoted Mao: "Revolution is not a dinner party. You're talking about one beheading. In the French Revolution, they had to invent the guillotine to cut off heads."<sup>315</sup>

#### **4.3 Post-1990 Growth**

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Maoist insurgency continued to grow throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium. The last decade has been the movement's most cohesive period, during which the movement not only survived, but thrived.<sup>316</sup> Since 2004, the Maoist cadre has grown from a united force of about 7 000 guerrillas to over 60 000 soldiers and supporters altogether.<sup>317</sup> Reports vary. Some believe the Maoist armed wing is now 20 000 strong, with perhaps a further 40 000 full-time cadres.<sup>318</sup> Other estimates place the number of armed guerrillas at 10 000, with a further 45 000 supporters.<sup>319</sup> In any event, recent growth has been significant and unprecedented.

This increase in membership occurred alongside territorial expansion. The Maoist heartland is the densely forested, resource-rich "tribal belt", which runs through some of India's poorest regions and is inhabited mostly by adivasis and dalits.<sup>320</sup> Beginning in Bastar district, Chhattisgarh, the insurgency spread exponentially. According to the Indian government, Maoists now control over 92 000 square kilometers in and around Dandakaranya, and have an influential presence across approximately one third of the country. This so-called "red corridor", extends from the Nepalese border to the southern coast, and includes

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<sup>314</sup> "Party Programme," CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 24-25.

<sup>315</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 163-164.

<sup>316</sup> Ramakrishnan, "The Road from Naxalbari", 8-21.

<sup>317</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist", *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>318</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 572-590.

<sup>319</sup> "The Maoists of India," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>320</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 572-590.



areas of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, east Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh (especially Telangana), Orissa, Bihar, West Bengal, and several others.<sup>321</sup>

Former Home Minister Shrivaj Patil once claimed (falsely) that only 2% of India's villages, and no more than 300 police stations, were affected by a Maoist presence, "as if that is not already an alarming figure."<sup>322</sup> Conflicting reports actually indicate that Maoists are influential in between 182 districts<sup>323</sup> and 195 districts<sup>324</sup> across 16 states, or, that they effectively control more than 200 districts total (that is, almost one third of all districts).<sup>325</sup> In Orissa alone, 10 of 30 districts are reportedly under Maoist control, police have abandoned 12 000 posts and precincts, and in some districts police officers refuse to wear uniforms while on duty. In Chhattisgarh, 16 of 20 police districts are considered "affected" by Maoists, and police often post 24-hour sentries in heavily armed watchtowers to protect their stations.<sup>326</sup>

In most areas the guerillas operate underground but in others, like Dandakaranya, they are well entrenched and can stage cross-border operations into neighboring states.<sup>327</sup> In 2005, about 900 people were killed in 1600 violent incidents involving Maoists, including some truly spectacular attacks such as a train holdup involving 250 guerrillas, and a jailbreak that freed 350 prisoners.<sup>328</sup> The following year, the number of Maoist-involved conflict incidents reportedly increased by a further 40%.<sup>329</sup> In one such incident, in 2008, 150 guerrillas walked from Bastar to Nayagarh, Orissa, a journey of three and a half months, to raid a police armory where they captured 1200 rifles and 200 000 rounds of ammunition.<sup>330</sup>

The Maoists plan to control a Compact Revolutionary Zone (CRZ) extending from Nepal to Dandakaranya and on towards southern Andhra Pradesh.

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<sup>321</sup> "The Maoists of India," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>322</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 191.

<sup>323</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 572-590.

<sup>324</sup> "The Maoists of India," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>325</sup> Garda, "Inside India's Red Corridor".

<sup>326</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 190-191.

<sup>327</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

<sup>328</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

<sup>329</sup> "The East is Red," *Economist*, 15 April 2006.

<sup>330</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

The goal is to possess a contiguous stretch of territory that will drive a wedge through the heart of India and connect their forces with other Maoist groups operating in Nepal and Bhutan. Large parts of the proposed CRZ are already under Maoist influence or control, with only a few “link-ups” necessary to make the CRZ a reality.<sup>331</sup>

The post-Cold War era, particularly since the unification of the movement, has been a period of great success and growth for the Maoist insurgency. What exactly was happening in the world’s largest democracy to swell support for what *The Economist* dismissed as “a primitive peasant rebellion based on an outmoded ideology”?<sup>332</sup> It is no coincidence that this recent surge in the Maoists’ membership, territory and influence corresponds with, first, India’s adoption of neoliberal economic policies, and second, political exclusion enforced by state violence.

#### **4.4 Neoliberalism**

India’s neo-liberal transformation was brought about, in part, by the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of India’s largest trading partners. Other events quickly conspired to make the change seem inevitable. In 1990, the invasion of Kuwait tripled the price of petroleum imports, creating a potential balance-of-payments crisis virtually overnight. The following year, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated and a Congress minority government was elected in the aftermath. By this time, government expenditures exceeded income by almost 10% and India was close to bankruptcy.<sup>333</sup> In the summer of 1991, Manmohan Singh – mild-mannered academic and bureaucrat, former governor of the Reserve Bank of India and deputy chair of the Planning Commission – received a phone call from the new government of Narasimha Rao, inviting him to become finance minister.<sup>334</sup>

Singh made it clear immediately on taking office that large structural changes were needed. An emergency rescheduling deal was secured with the IMF

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<sup>331</sup> “Communist Party of India-Maoist”, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>332</sup> “A Spectre Haunting India,” *The Economist*.

<sup>333</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 148-152.

<sup>334</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 148-152.

and within weeks an emergency budget was presented to Parliament. On that occasion, Singh told MPs that India could no longer continue to live beyond her means. A second budget was later adopted which introduced more severe reforms than even the IMF had demanded. Indeed, the reforms Singh introduced went much further than addressing the liquidity crisis. They amounted instead to an abrupt and wholesale abandonment of Nehruvian socialism in favor of neo-liberalism.<sup>335</sup>

What followed was a period of unprecedented liberalization in all sectors of the economy. Within weeks, Singh had moved to devalue the rupee, cut tariffs, dismantle subsidies and price controls, and deregulate trade and industry.<sup>336</sup> Successive rounds of trade reforms brought maximum tariff levels down from over 300% in 1990-1991 to 40% by 1997-1998, while nominal weighted average import tariffs decreased from 87% in 1990-1991 to 20% in 1997-1998.<sup>337</sup> Controls on foreign capital imposed by the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act were relaxed, the statutory liquidity ratio and incremental cash reserve were lowered, and interest rates were freed.<sup>338</sup> The Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act was also substantially reformed to relax controls and regulations. With few exceptions, the import licensing system and industrial licensing system were abolished.<sup>339</sup> Many industries which had once been the sole preserve of state-owned enterprises were also opened up to the private sector, perhaps the most important being the power sector.<sup>340</sup>

Although expenditures for India's two largest subsidies, food and fertilizer, remained level, the share of subsidies in the GDP was actually reduced by inflation and as a percentage of total government expenditure.<sup>341</sup> In a move that proved extremely unpopular, the price of subsidized food was continuously raised, and a debt-relief program for farmers, which cost Rs. 15 billion in 1991, was completely

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<sup>335</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 151-152.

<sup>336</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 152.

<sup>337</sup> Rob Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>338</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 20.

<sup>339</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 17-18.

<sup>340</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 19.

<sup>341</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 23-25.

phased out by 1996.<sup>342</sup> Reforms in the agricultural sector were comparatively limited, but even so, state trading corporations were largely abandoned, and quantitative restrictions on agricultural trade were dismantled.<sup>343</sup>

Reforms were not limited to the central government in Delhi but also extended down to state level. “Forced to compete with one another to create investor-friendly climates,” state governments became major facilitators of new investments.<sup>344</sup> They instituted complex tax reforms, quietly commercialized public-sector firms (some termed this “back-door privatization”), and reduced the time required for government clearances for land acquisition, pollution control approval and tax registration.<sup>345</sup>

Reforms created considerable fiscal burdens for the state, including higher interest payments on government debt and lost revenues.<sup>346</sup> Nevertheless, fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP (the indicator *sine qua non* of true structural adjustment for many economists) dropped significantly in the reform period.<sup>347</sup> About these reforms, the World Bank pronounced that, “India has fundamentally altered its development strategy...ended four decades of planning and...initiated a quiet economic revolution.”<sup>348</sup> Despite two successive changes of government – one to the left and the other to the right – economic reform in India continued unabated and was, in fact, strengthened throughout the decade.<sup>349</sup>

The reforms were lauded as beneficial for economic growth and development. Growth was, admittedly, astounding. By 2000, India's GDP was growing 6.5% annually, then 8% in 2005<sup>350</sup> and hovered around 9% in 2011.<sup>351</sup> India's share of world exports also grew, as did its export earnings. The average rate of growth of Indian exports was over 20% annually throughout the past

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<sup>342</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 23-25.

<sup>343</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 23-25.

<sup>344</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 18.

<sup>345</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 26.

<sup>346</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 24.

<sup>347</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 20.

<sup>348</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 28.

<sup>349</sup> Jenkins, *Democratic Politics and Economic Reform in India*, 1.

<sup>350</sup> Barbara Metcalf and Thomas Metcalf, *A Concise History of Modern India* second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 296.

<sup>351</sup> Vikas Bajaj, “Gallop­ing Growth, and Hunger in India,” *New York Times*, 11 February 2011.

decade.<sup>352</sup> In 1991, export earnings stood at \$18bn per year.<sup>353</sup> A decade later, they had reached \$45bn, and are now heading toward \$200bn annually.<sup>354</sup> A recent study by Goldman Sachs predicted that India would become the world's third-largest economy, behind China and the United States, within three decades.<sup>355</sup>

Even so, other indicators showed serious deterioration after 1991. Government earnings fell, even though borrowing remained high. Inflation rose to unexpected levels, hovering around 9% wholesale.<sup>356</sup> While non-agricultural GDP growth rates increased significantly, the growth rate of India's agricultural sector sharply declined; in recent years, the agricultural sector showed a growth rate of only 3%.<sup>357</sup> This is especially significant because about 70% of India's total workforce is employed in agriculture.<sup>358</sup> Only around 1.3 million Indians (in a country of over one billion inhabitants) are believed to have any real stake in the "new economy".<sup>359</sup>

Declining growth in agriculture further widened the income disparity between urban and rural Indians. The ratio of per-worker income between the non-agricultural and agricultural sectors rose from 3.5:1 in 1991, to 5.2:1 in 2001.<sup>360</sup> Indeed, while fewer than one-third of Indians live in urban centers, cities now generate as much as three-quarters of India's GDP.<sup>361</sup> And, while the rural labour pool continued to grow (by 66 million workers between 1993 and 2004), employment growth in agriculture remained stagnant.<sup>362</sup> Additionally, the average size of landholdings in India was halved. Over 40% of India's rural population had become landless by the year 2000. The clear implication is that rural incomes were

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<sup>352</sup> Government of India, *Economic Survey 09-10*, New Delhi, 2010 in French, *India: A Portrait*, 154.

<sup>353</sup> Government of India, *Economic Survey* in French, *India: A Portrait*, 154.

<sup>354</sup> Government of India, *Economic Survey* in French, *India: A Portrait*, 154.

<sup>355</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 185.

<sup>356</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 153; Jaswant Singh, "India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?" *Al Jazeera English*, 31 March 2011.

<sup>357</sup> Bajaj, "Gallop Growth, and Hunger in India."

<sup>358</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 187.

<sup>359</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 187.

<sup>360</sup> Ramesh Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and the Response to the WTO in South Asian Countries," In *Food Security: Indicators, Measurement and The Impact of Trade Openness*, edited by Basudes Guha-Khasnobis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 274-276.

<sup>361</sup> Amab Neil Sengupta, "Indian Elites' Rude Awakening" *Al Jazeera English* 21 September 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/09/20119144314236959.html>.

<sup>362</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 579.

declining and agriculture was no longer viable for the majority of Indians for whom it is not only a livelihood but the only way of life they know.<sup>363</sup>

Since adopting neo-liberal reforms, India has also struggled with balance-of-payments issues. India's trade surplus initially increased after 1991, but by 1998 this trend had reversed, and trade surplus dropped well below its position in the early 1990s.<sup>364</sup> Before the adoption of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture, India spent only 43% of its export earnings financing imports. However, by the end of the 1990s more than 70% of export earnings were being used to finance agricultural imports alone.<sup>365</sup> Between 1997 and 2007, cotton imports increased more than tenfold.<sup>366</sup> Cotton exports almost completely evaporated by 2002, and India was forced to import cotton lint to meet domestic demand.<sup>367</sup>

As might be expected, India experienced a dramatic decline in food security as it became ever more reliant on imports to meet domestic demand. Prior to the adoption of the WTO agreement, India met less than one percent of its domestic food demand from abroad.<sup>368</sup> However, import dependence for total food increased almost three-fold in the first decade after the WTO agreement. For example, within that period, import dependence doubled for pulses and increased almost eight-fold for vegetable oils such that by 2007 almost half of domestic demand was met by imports.<sup>369</sup>

Peasant indebtedness also began to mount after 1991, a direct result of reforms in the agricultural sector. State subsidies for fertilizer, pesticides and other Green Revolution inputs were abandoned, leading to considerable price increases and higher production costs for small farmers. In 1994, India's power sector was deregulated and privatized, resulting in massive tariff increases. As they did in 1967, increased production costs forced small farmers to take on loans. But because reforms had also eliminated state-sponsored low-cost loan programs, most debtors sought relief from village moneylenders, who often charge usurious interest

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<sup>363</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 579.

<sup>364</sup> Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and Response to the WTO", 264-268.

<sup>365</sup> Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and Response to the WTO", 264-268.

<sup>366</sup> Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and Response to the WTO", 264-268.

<sup>367</sup> Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and Response to the WTO", 264-268.

<sup>368</sup> Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and Response to the WTO", 269-274.

<sup>369</sup> Chand, "International Trade, Food Security, and Response to the WTO", 269-274.

rates of up to 60% per annum.<sup>370</sup> By 2003, 76% of rural households were indebted to moneylenders.<sup>371</sup>

Widespread indebtedness led to an epidemic of farmer suicides. It is estimated that since 1998, between 25 000 and as many as 100 000 Indian farmers have taken their own lives, many by swallowing the very pesticides that had beggared them.<sup>372</sup> Other sources estimate as many as 150 000 debt-motivated suicides occurred over the last two decades.<sup>373</sup> In Andhra Pradesh alone, for example, seven farmers killed themselves every day in 2004.<sup>374</sup> A suicide help line established by the state government that year logged over 800 calls in its first week of operation.<sup>375</sup> The vast majority of suicides occur in the most capital-intensive states where the cultivation of cash crops predominates.<sup>376</sup> The Indian government has repeatedly denied that the suicide epidemic is driven by reforms, instead attributing farmers' crushing debt to personal problems like gambling and illicit affairs.<sup>377</sup>

Rural India could now be described as a humanitarian disaster zone. India has higher rates of malnutrition than Sub-Saharan Africa and is home to one third of the world's malnourished children.<sup>378</sup> It is estimated that nearly half of Indian children 5 years of age or younger suffer from malnutrition, and almost half of all Indian children below five years of age suffer from stunted growth.<sup>379</sup> By 2005, the portion of India's rural population unable to access the recommended minimum number of calories per day had grown to a record high of 87%.<sup>380</sup> An average rural

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<sup>370</sup> Muzaffar Assadi, "Farmers' Suicide in India: Agrarian Crisis, Path of Development and Politics in Karnataka," Mysore: University of Mysore.

<sup>371</sup> Assadi, "Farmers' Suicide in India".

<sup>372</sup> Annette Aurélie Desmarais, *La Via Campesina: Globalization and the Power of Peasants* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2007), 66.

<sup>373</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 189.

<sup>374</sup> Desmarais, *La Via Campesina*, 67.

<sup>375</sup> Amy Waldman, "Debts and Drought Drive India's Farmers to Despair *New York Times* nytimes.com 6 June 2004.

<sup>376</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 572-573.

<sup>377</sup> Assadi, "Farmers' Suicide in India".

<sup>378</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 189.

<sup>379</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 560-572.

<sup>380</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 560-572. The Planning Commission recommends, as a national norm, 2,400 calories per day for individuals in rural areas and 2,100 calories per day for individuals in urban areas. See *infra* Chopra, "Calorie Intake of the Rural Poor has Drastically Fallen".

family today consumes 100 kg less food per year than they did in the early 1990s.<sup>381</sup> In 2010, the International Food Policy Research Institute ranked India 67 out of 84 countries in its Global Hunger Index, a survey of child malnutrition, child mortality and calorie deficiency.<sup>382</sup> All this has resulted in an increase in starvation deaths that, while initially common only in the least developed states, by 2005 had become common in more prosperous states such as Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh.<sup>383</sup> According to the Planning Commission's 2011 Human Development Report, *all* Indian states are currently facing "a serious to extremely alarming situation of hunger" even in Punjab and Gujarat, India's most prosperous states.<sup>384</sup>

Since then, the cost of staple foods has continued to rise. The price of staple foods increased over 9% in June of 2011 alone.<sup>385</sup> A "snapshot" released in 2011 showed a 17% increase in staple food prices over the same period in 2009.<sup>386</sup> Food-price inflation is especially cruel because Indians spend a larger portion of their disposable income on food than people in other developing economies.<sup>387</sup> Other estimates now place food-price inflation between 14% and 20% annually.<sup>388</sup>

According to the World Bank, 456 million Indians (over 40% of the total population) had incomes below the official poverty threshold of US\$1.25 per day at

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<sup>381</sup> Arundhati Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers: Field Notes on Democracy* (Toronto: Penguin, 2009), 31.

<sup>382</sup> Nirmala George, "Weddings Faulted for Prodigious Food Waste," *HuffingtonPost.com*, 21 July 2011.

<sup>383</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 560-572.

<sup>384</sup> Ritika Chopra, "Calorie Intake of the Rural Poor has Drastically Fallen, says Planning Commission Report", *India Today* 22 October 2011. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/poverty-malnutrition-india-hunger-index/1/157110/html>. This bleak picture contrasts appallingly with the growing and conspicuous consumption of India's urban elite. See e.g. Nirmala George, "Weddings Faulted for Prodigious Food Waste," *HuffingtonPost.com*, 21 July 2011. [www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/21/india-weddings-food-waste\\_n\\_906119.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/21/india-weddings-food-waste_n_906119.html). According to government estimates, about one-fifth of the food served at affluent weddings and social events in India is discarded. The food discarded daily at weddings and family functions in Mumbai alone would be sufficient to feed that city's vast slum population. This phenomenon is so ubiquitous, it is colloquially known as "the Big Fat Indian Wedding" and has prompted India's Food Minister, K. V. Thomas, to develop a public awareness campaign urging a less wasteful attitude to food. Plans to enact restrictions on function and serving size were abandoned for fear of creating another vehicle for corruption.

<sup>385</sup> George, "Weddings Faulted for Prodigious Food Waste."

<sup>386</sup> Bajaj, "Gallopig Growth and Hunger in India".

<sup>387</sup> Bajaj, "Gallopig Growth and Hunger in India".

<sup>388</sup> Bajaj, "Gallopig Growth and Hunger in India"; Singh, "India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?"



2005 PPP in 2008.<sup>389</sup> A UN study found more people living below the poverty threshold in eight Indian states than in all of sub-Saharan Africa combined. To tackle such widespread poverty, the UN recommended more government involvement by, for example, improving access to health services and providing subsidized food grains. Instead, in a move as Machiavellian as it was genius, the Indian government simply redefined India's official poverty line. Unsurprisingly, this was not actually helpful. In 2011, some estimates found that 77% of Indians continued to live below the poverty line.<sup>390</sup>

Neo-liberal reforms have not only severely depressed the agricultural economy, but also systematically dismantled already deficient public services. The withdrawal of the state has been gradual but erratic, leaving farmers "ill equipped to compete" and unable to shoulder rising production costs. For example, the cost of powering irrigation pumps rose (in some villages, as much as seven-fold) as the government reduced power subsidies.<sup>391</sup> The cost of fertilizer and pesticides also rose as subsidies were reduced. Simultaneously, banks and cooperative societies, "under pressure in an era of reform to show more fiscal responsibility," have been increasingly reluctant to extend loans.<sup>392</sup> As government services have declined, the Maoists have stepped in, garnering public support by working to meet the day-to-day needs of India's most vulnerable communities.

The Maoist base of support is on the margins of Indian society, in the remote, forested tribal areas and impoverished villages where the Indian state is – save the police and army – largely invisible. In such places, there are no roads, wells, electricity or telephone lines, and no teachers, health workers or government officials. In the Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh, for example, 1161 of its 1220 villages have no medical facilities, 214 have no primary schools, and the literacy rate is below 30%.<sup>393</sup> In the very remotest regions, government services are

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<sup>389</sup> Raghav Gaiha, "Poverty of Statistics: The World Bank's new criterion questions the much-touted trickle-down," *Outlook Magazine* 15 Sept 2008, In Thornton, 185.

<sup>390</sup> "Inside Story: Redefining Poverty," *Al Jazeera English*, 22 May 2011.

<sup>391</sup> Amy Waldman, "Debts and Drought Drive India's Farmers to Despair," *New York Times nytimes.com* 6 June 2004.

<sup>392</sup> Waldman, "Debts and Drought Drive India's Farmers to Despair."

<sup>393</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

virtually non-existent, with some villages having last seen a development officer in the 1960s.<sup>394</sup>

Maoist *sarkars* and services fill the vacuum. In many areas, especially parts of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Jharkland and Andhra Pradesh, the Maoists have effectively become the state, providing social services such as schools and medical clinics.<sup>395</sup> Their presence has the effect of bringing usually absent teachers into the local schools, and they dig ponds and wells for a fraction of the cost of government projects. Volunteer doctors help train comrades in the Maoists' health wing. They also combat illiteracy by teaching their members to read and write through the Young Communists Mobile School.<sup>396</sup> The Maoists also administer their own brand of justice through *jan adalat* or "peoples' courts".<sup>397</sup> Speaking about a rape trial held by a peoples' court in Gopalpur-on-Sea, one Member of Parliament for Orissa conceded, "The Maoists gave justice there, and they have a family for life."<sup>398</sup>

Rahul Pandita, a journalist who has written extensively on the Maoist insurgency and conducted several interviews with its top leaders, has remarked on the close ties between villagers in Dandakaranya and the guerrillas. Maoists often share meals with villagers in their camps, and Maoist medical teams distribute medicine among them, including anti-malarial drugs, anti-venoms and vaccines. "In the absence of the State, it is the guerillas who they rely on for help in small ways," writes Pandita. "Unsurprisingly, some end up joining them."<sup>399</sup>

Pavarvel village in Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra, notorious for being the site of the gang rape of a 13 year old girl by police, is an example of how growing poverty and a lack of government services cultivates support for the Maoists. Pavarvel has no electricity, (a government official arrives every year to collect electricity tax nevertheless), water is available only from a ramshackle bore pump, and villagers rely on the services of a witch doctor for their health care needs. Rice

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<sup>394</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 165-6.

<sup>395</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 582-583.

<sup>396</sup> Choudhary, "In Naxal Heartland", 70-72; Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>397</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 582-583.

<sup>398</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 171.

<sup>399</sup> Rahul Pandita, "100lb Guerillas," *Open Magazine*, 18 September 2010.

is a luxury, and some residents are unable to marry because their neighbors cannot afford the traditional gift of rice for the ceremony. However, the Indian government was able to spare a helicopter to ferry the afore-mentioned girl to police custody when Maharashtra Police's C-60 Commando group accused her of being a Maoist.<sup>400</sup>

While generally unsympathetic to the Maoists or their politics, the commentator Patrick French nevertheless notes that, "they [have] tapped into an anger felt by many against the Indian state, and the sense that the fruits of economic liberalization were bypassing swathes of central and eastern India."<sup>401</sup> Similarly, the director of Delhi's Institute of Conflict Management, Ajai Sahni, is quick to note that "these areas have fallen off the map of governance as economic liberalization has focused government attention elsewhere."<sup>402</sup> While these comments contain rather more than a kernel of truth, they are nevertheless misleading. Because, as the experience of Pavarvel village indicates, the red corridor has not entirely escaped the notice of Delhi.

Lest one believe that the red corridor's *isolation* from the economic and political developments of the past two decades is responsible for the poverty and therefore for the Maoists, be assured that the red corridor does not lack for state attention or the interest of investors. Indeed, the red corridor "could in equal measure be called the 'natural resources corridor'"<sup>403</sup>, and it has been the site of intensive economic activity under the new neo-liberal regime. It is not the *absence* of state intervention that drives the Maoist insurgency, nor, as French implies, is it that the inevitable fruits of liberalization have simply bypassed these remote regions. It is, rather, the neo-liberal reforms themselves and the state violence used to enforce them that generates support for the movement.

Nowhere is this more in evidence than the forcible seizure of land by the state in the name of economic growth and development. Land acquisition by the Indian government for development projects is not a new phenomenon. In the fifty

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<sup>400</sup> Rahul Pandita, "The War Nobody Can Ever Win," *Open Magazine*, 17 April 2010.

<sup>401</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 162.

<sup>402</sup> "The East is Red." *Economist*.

<sup>403</sup> Garda, "Inside India's Red Corridor".

years following independence, as many as 30 million Indians were displaced for the construction of dams, canals, power stations and other infrastructure.<sup>404</sup> However, land seizures have accelerated at an unprecedented rate since the shift to neo-liberalism in 1991. Between 2001 and 2006, 500 000 hectares of forest were seized for development projects, a larger amount than was seized altogether in the previous 20 years combined. And, with few exceptions, land seizures have focused on the mineral-rich “tribal belt” that is the heartland of the Maoist insurgency, especially Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.<sup>405</sup>

In these isolated corners of the country, India’s entrepreneurial class has found a wealth of buried treasure. Bauxite, high-grade iron ore, thorium, coal, chromites, nickel, manganese and other valuable minerals lie in vast quantities beneath forest and farmland. The potential profits are staggering. According to a recent Lokayukta<sup>406</sup> report for Karnataka, mining companies can expect to earn Rs 5000 per ton of iron ore while the government receives royalties of Rs 27. For bauxite, the figures are even higher.<sup>407</sup> Between 2002 and 2005 alone, the Orissa state government signed 42 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs)<sup>408</sup> with corporations for proposed mining and other industrial operations.<sup>409</sup> Since 2005, the governments of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and West Bengal have also signed hundreds of MoUs worth billions of dollars with multiple corporate houses. The MoUs are chiefly for mines, steel plants, sponge-iron factories and aluminum refineries, as well as supporting infrastructure like dams and power plants.<sup>410</sup> In 2005, Orissa became the site of India’s largest-ever foreign investment when it signed a MoU with the Pohang Steel Company of South Korea for the construction

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<sup>404</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-582.

<sup>405</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-582.

<sup>406</sup> The Lokayukta is a state-level anti-corruption ombudsman that reports on corruption among politicians, bureaucrats and other government officers. See e.g. official website of the Lokayukta of Andhra Pradesh, <http://lokyukta.ap.nic.in>.

<sup>407</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

<sup>408</sup> A “Memorandum of Understanding” is a document that records a bilateral or multilateral agreement between parties. They are often used when the parties cannot create a legally enforceable agreement. However, MoUs may acquire the binding power of a contract depending on the exact text and circumstances of the agreement.

<sup>409</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 581.

<sup>410</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

of a US\$12 billion steel plant.<sup>411</sup> A Morgan Stanley report predicted that Orissa would draw up to \$40 billion in new investments between 2006 and 2011.<sup>412</sup>

Land seizures have been even more aggressive since the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) Act was adopted in 2006, which promotes the establishment of enclosed, duty-free enclaves for manufacturing and export. Since then, hundreds of sites have been approved for development, especially in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. It was initially projected that 400 000 acres of land would be required for SEZ development, but a much larger figure is now more realistic.<sup>413</sup> Between 2000 and 2007, over 220 SEZs were established – with another 250 in the planning stages – across 21 states.<sup>414</sup> By 2008, 110 SEZs were approved for Chhattisgarh alone. Speaking about the SEZ Act and subsequent land scramble, the eminent Indian historian Sumit Sarkar stated, “India has never before witnessed the transfer of hundreds of thousands of hectares of agricultural land to private industry...[the SEZ policy] is liable to create one of the greatest land grabs in modern Indian history.”<sup>415</sup>

For all of these projects, the land must be cleared and those living on it must be moved.<sup>416</sup> Land acquisitions are often conducted under the Land Acquisition Act of 1894, an archaic law from the British Raj that enables the appropriation of private land even when objections have been filed. As one commentator described, “in the name of ‘development’ the neoliberal Indian state is invoking colonial legislation to carry out a new process of colonization of its own people...”<sup>417</sup>

Most affected landowners and displaced residents receive inadequate compensation for their lost property, if they receive any at all, and are rarely resettled or rehabilitated. In the case of Kalinganagar Industrial Area in Jajpur, for example, the Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation of Orissa admitted that about 1500 of 1800 displaced families did not receive compensation for which

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<sup>411</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 581.

<sup>412</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 581.

<sup>413</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-582.

<sup>414</sup> Thornton, “India in Search of Itself”, 194.

<sup>415</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 587.

<sup>416</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

<sup>417</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-582.

they were eligible.<sup>418</sup> Landless laborers, tenants, sharecroppers, and those who cannot produce written title to their land are eligible for no compensation whatsoever.<sup>419</sup>

Adivasis have been especially victimized by land seizures. Adivasis have always had a difficult relationship with the Indian state, particularly in the guise of the Forest Department. The new constitution of independent India granted custodianship of tribal homelands to the state, effectively turning millions of adivasis into squatters. Further legislation criminalized many adivasi customs and traditional life-ways by, for example, forbidding hunting and harvesting forest produce on tribal lands. And, of the tens of millions of Indians displaced for dam construction in the post-independence period, the great majority were adivasis.<sup>420</sup> Adivasi communities continue to be displaced for mining and development projects in the neo-liberal reform era. In fact, while they comprise less than 10% of the national population, they are the objects of over 50% of land evictions.<sup>421</sup> Rarely do they have any legal recourse, since they often cannot produce legal title to the lands of their ancestors.<sup>422</sup>

Rajarhat New Town, a planned neighborhood of Calcutta, West Bengal, is emblematic of the land seizures process. Land acquisition for the project began in 1996. Using the Land Acquisition Act (and in violation of many of its already lax provisions), the state seized over 3000 hectares of farmland in 18 districts.<sup>423</sup> Most landowners were small or marginal farmers, and almost all refused to comply because the compensation offered to them was so low. Nevertheless, the land was cleared and construction began. To remove obstinate farmers the government dumped truckloads of silt onto standing crops and removed river pumps that irrigated thousands of acres. In some cases, land speculators simply seized

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<sup>418</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 580-583.

<sup>419</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 580-583.

<sup>420</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>421</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 194.

<sup>422</sup> Thornton, "India in Search of Itself", 194.

<sup>423</sup> Jaideep Mazumdar, "India's Worst Land Grab," *Open Magazine*, 12 September 2009.

farmland without following any legal process and state departments later gave these fraudulent transfers legal cover.<sup>424</sup>

The tens of thousands of farmers who lost their land, and the thousands more local sharecroppers and laborers who lost their jobs, face a bleak future of low-wage and irregular employment. According to Nilotpal Dutta of the Rajarhat Anti-Land Acquisition Committee,

Women of land owning families work as maidservants if they're lucky. Many have been forced into prostitution. Trafficking is rife, and alcoholism and drug abuse have risen alarmingly. Hundreds of men have become petty thieves or joined crime syndicates.<sup>425</sup>

One reporter for *Open* magazine described the land acquisition process for Rajarhat New Town as, "India's worst land acquisition story; nowhere else has so much land been taken over by the state with such brute force from so many farmers, many of whom haven't received a single rupee as compensation and are now virtually destitute."<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>424</sup> Mazumdar, "India's Worst Land Grab".

<sup>425</sup> Mazumdar, "India's Worst Land Grab."

<sup>426</sup> Mazumdar, "India's Worst Land Grab." Rajarhat New Town may be India's worst land acquisition story but there are many others. See e.g. Rahul Pandita, "The Curious Case of Vedanta University." *Open Magazine*, 12 February 2011. In 2006, Vedanta Foundation submitted a proposal to Orissa for land to build an eponymous university. Vedanta initially requested 15 000 acres and was promised 10 000, but this was later reduced to almost 7000 after public protest. A number of shenanigans surrounded the deal. Provisions of the Indian Companies Act, 1956, and the University Grants Commission Act, 1956, were not followed. The university was exempted from state reservation laws and from all construction-related levies and taxes. False statements were made in the state assembly, and suspicious documents were produced. (Anil Agarwal, founder and executive chairman of Vedanta, funded both the 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha election campaigns of Orissa's ruling BJD party.) Observers also questioned whether Vedanta intended this land for university use at all. 82 million tons of thorium-bearing monazite was found in the area. The campus infrastructure was designed to support half a million residents (requiring 600 MW of electricity and 110 million liters of water *every day*), and given that most universities worldwide are fewer than 400 acres, the size of the campus would be truly extraordinary. Activists suspected that the project would extend beyond mineral interests to a real estate program including hotels, resorts and golf courses. (The fact that Jagannath Temple in Puri, an important Hindu pilgrimage destination, is located nearby, added to these suspicions.) The project would be immensely disruptive to local residents and the environment. Eighty percent of acquired land is agricultural, lies near two important rivers and a wildlife sanctuary, and about 10 000 families would be displaced. Vedanta was also granted bizarre special considerations, including virtual control over land and residents within a 5 kilometer radius of the campus (for example, residents would require permission from Vedanta to undertake any structural work on their own property, while Jagannath Temple would need clearance from Vedanta to hold Rath Yatra, a centuries-old Hindu festival). The deal began to fall apart in 2007 when Janyat Das, a Supreme Court senior advocate and former Advocate General of Orissa, stirred opposition to the project. The deal was eventually rejected by Orissa's High Court, and in January 2011, the Supreme Court asked Orissa to cease any work on land already acquired by Vedanta.

Importantly, this nation-wide, systematic dispossession of land and subsequent industrialization has produced no improvements in government services or in social indicators. Orissa state is an excellent example. Despite billions of dollars worth of investment, in 2005 Orissa still boasted India's highest poverty rate, with fully half the population living below the poverty line.<sup>427</sup> The literacy rate among adivasis in that state hovered below 40%.<sup>428</sup> As one PLGA company commander described the neo-liberal development model, “the government is bent upon taking out all the resources from this area and leaving the people nothing.”<sup>429</sup> Clearly, these areas have not simply “fallen off the map of governance” or been “bypassed by the inevitable fruits of economic liberalization.” They are, despite their seeming isolation, very much at the epicenter of the neo-liberal revolution. They are the heart of the “new India”. The problem, it seems, is that there is no room in the new India for the people of Bastar, Dandakaranya or Naxalbari.

The Indian government has recognized the connection between growing poverty and the Maoist presence. As stated in a Ministry of Home Affairs annual report,

Naxalites operate in the vacuum created by functional inadequacies of field level governance structures, espouse local demands, and take advantage of prevalent disaffection and feelings of perceived neglect and injustice among the underprivileged and remote segments of population.<sup>430</sup>

Rahul Pandita similarly highlighted poverty and violent land acquisitions as reasons for the movement's expansion:

It took many years for the government of India to very reluctantly accept the fact that the Maoist insurgency is not just a law and order problem but a socio-economic concern. But while on the one hand they have accepted it, on the ground nothing has changed. The answer is to promote development...I think [the Maoist insurgency] is going to expand because of the kind of policies we have in these areas. On one hand, you have hundreds of thousands of tons of wheat and other food grains rotting in government godowns. As long as people keep on dying of hunger, as long

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<sup>427</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-583.

<sup>428</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-583.

<sup>429</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 580-583.

<sup>430</sup> Government of India, *Ministry of Home Affairs Annual Report 08-09*, New Delhi, in French, *India: A Portrait*, 171.



as their lands are taken away, as long as they are displaced and their lives are destroyed; it's only going to expand.<sup>431</sup>

Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh echoed this sentiment in a lecture he gave in Delhi in October 2011. In his own words,

Let us be clear, paramilitary and police action cannot and should not be the driving force. The driving force has necessarily to be development and addressing the daily concerns of people, of people who have every reason to feel alienated.<sup>432</sup>

However, this is exactly the approach the Indian government has refused to take. Rather, the government has responded with increasingly violent military intervention and ever more draconian, anti-democratic laws.<sup>433</sup>

#### **4.5 Political Exclusion Enforced by Violence**

In addition to neo-liberal reforms, the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency's recent growth has also been driven by political exclusion largely enforced by violence. India's political culture has been characterized by dynasticism, corruption and exclusion since Independence. Dynastic politics "has become the most salient feature of Indian democracy, and nearly all political parties are ridden with it."<sup>434</sup> For example, Prime Minister Nehru was succeeded as prime minister by his daughter Indira Gandhi, who was succeeded by her son, Rajiv.<sup>435</sup> Rajiv Gandhi's widow eventually succeeded him as party president.<sup>436</sup> Their son, Rahul Gandhi, is now vice-president of Congress and campaigned for "his" party in the latest national election. Despite losing disastrously to Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party, he is still regarded as a prime minister-in-waiting and "reluctant prince", and is expected to lead the official opposition in *Lok Sabha*.<sup>437</sup> In fact, in the 67 years

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<sup>431</sup> "Q&A," *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>432</sup> Rahul Pandita, "Blind in Dantewada," *Open Magazine*, 15 October 2011.

<sup>433</sup> Pandita, "Blind in Dantewada".

<sup>434</sup> "India Elections: Snippets from the Battlefield." *Al Jazeera English*, 9 February 2012.

<sup>435</sup> Peter Robb, *A History of India*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 222.

<sup>436</sup> Saif Khalid, "Dynastic Politics Holds Sway in India." *Al Jazeera English*, 16 February 2012.

<sup>437</sup> See e.g. "Profile: Rahul Gandhi", *BBC News Asia* 16 May 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-17271658>; Rahul Kanwal, "Elections 2014: Rahul Gandhi - The Prince with No Clothes", *India Today* 26 May 2014.

<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/rahul-gandhi-congress-elections-2014-manmohan-singh-narendra-modi-bjp/1/363694.html>; Subodh Ghildiyal, "Rahul Gandhi should become leader of opposition:

since independence, the Gandhi family has been directly or indirectly in power for over 50 years.<sup>438</sup>

The Gandhi family is perhaps India's most famous political lineage, but it is far from the only one. Each party and each state has its own political dynasties, with power passing from fathers to sons, aunts to nephews, grandfathers to granddaughters and so on.<sup>439</sup> In a particularly egregious case the former Chief Minister of Bihar, Lalu Yadav, installed his semi-literate wife as his replacement after he was arrested for fraud.<sup>440</sup> Rahul Gandhi himself has admitted that Indian politics "depends on who you know or are related to," and has expressed a desire for change.<sup>441</sup> Jaswant Singh, former leader of the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (and former finance, foreign and defense minister) has argued that dynastic politics encourage corruption, writing that, "inherited political power is the very antithesis of democracy...the 'dynasticism' that has taken such a firm grip on much of Indian politics plays a large role in fostering corruption."<sup>442</sup>

Corruption is indeed an ongoing and severe problem. India ranks 87<sup>th</sup> on Transparency International's Index of Corruption.<sup>443</sup> In many cases corruption is so blatant and absurd that it appears to be a joke. In recent state legislative elections, parties of every stripe rushed to lure potential voters by offering bribes and gifts, ranging from free computers to cows to a regular caste quota in certain jobs.<sup>444</sup> The incumbent chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, who goes by the singular name Mayawati, is in the process of building a sprawling park on the outskirts of Delhi adorned with statues of herself and of elephants, her party symbol. The statues alone reportedly cost the state treasury an estimated \$120 million.<sup>445</sup> Career Point, a school for those preparing to join India's bureaucracy, recently opened a class for aspiring politicians, which (as it advertises) "trains aspiring leaders how to

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Digvijaya Singh", *The Times of India* 29 May 2014. <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Rahul-Gandhi-should-become-leader-of-opposition-Digvijaya-Singh/articleshow/35698115.cms>.

<sup>438</sup> Khalid, "Dynastic Politics Holds Sway in India".

<sup>439</sup> "Snippets from the Battlefield," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>440</sup> Khalid, "Dynastic Politics Holds Sway in India."

<sup>441</sup> "Must it be a Gandhi?" *The Economist*, 19 Nov 2011.

<sup>442</sup> Singh, "India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?"

<sup>443</sup> Jason Burke, "Corruption in India: 'all your life you pay for things that should be free'," *The Guardian*, 19 August 2011.

<sup>444</sup> "Snippets from the Battlefield," *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>445</sup> "Snippets from the Battlefield," *Al Jazeera*.

circumvent and manipulate electoral laws to their advantage.”<sup>446</sup> In 2010, several Indian citizens launched the website *ipaidabribe.com* to collect anonymous reports of bribes. In little over a year, the site had collected almost half a million reports.<sup>447</sup>

Jaswant Singh describes corruption in India as “crippling all organs of the state and reaching into its highest offices.” Indeed, the ruling Congress party has recently been mired in a number of major corruption scandals, including a telecommunications license scam wherein some \$30 *billion* may have been syphoned from state coffers through corrupt practices.<sup>448</sup> During the 2010-2011 winter session of Parliament, the opposition demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee to inquire into the scandals but the government would not concede. This developed into a paralyzing standoff, during which Prime Minister Singh expressed concerns about the future of parliamentary democracy in India. In fact, not a single item of legislative, governmental or other business was completed during that entire session.<sup>449</sup>

Corruption at all levels also interferes with the state’s ability to deliver vital public services. In 2005, the government in Delhi established the National Rural Health Mission, which aimed to overhaul rural health care delivery by building hundreds of thousands of new clinics and hiring millions of new health workers. However, this vast increase in health funds was an invitation to corruption. Reportedly, contracts worth US\$ hundreds of millions were granted without competitive bidding, and millions more were paid in full to contractors who did not complete their work, leaving clinics half-built and unequipped.<sup>450</sup> Uttar Pradesh, home to 200 million people and India’s most populous state, was further scandalized by the murder of three chief medical officers who oversaw the city of

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<sup>446</sup> “Snippets from the Battlefield,” *Al Jazeera*.

<sup>447</sup> Stephanie Strom, “Web Sites Shine Light on Petty Bribery Worldwide.” *New York Times*, 6 March 2012.

<sup>448</sup> Singh, “India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?”

<sup>449</sup> Singh, “India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?”

<sup>450</sup> Lydia Polgreen, “Health Officials at Risk as India’s Graft Thrives” *New York Times* 17 September 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/world/asia/graft-poisons-uttar-pradesh-health-system-in-india.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

Lucknow's health funds. The murders are widely attributed to the doctors' refusal to remain silent about corruption.<sup>451</sup>

While corruption in government is extremely common, corruption in the private sector may be equally prevalent.<sup>452</sup> India's billionaires (55 in total as of 2011<sup>453</sup>) control a considerably larger share of the national wealth than billionaires do in other economies (about 1/6<sup>th</sup> of India's total GDP).<sup>454</sup> Most derive their wealth from land, natural resources, or government contracts and licenses. Consequently, their success is made possible in no small part by their "coziness with powerful politicians who help arrange environmental clearances, land use rights and other thorny issues."<sup>455</sup> In a single year, from 2006 to 2007, the combined wealth of India's billionaires rose by a staggering 60% to US\$170 billion. According to the reputed Indian economist Amit Bhaduri, this phenomenal increase would not have been possible except through the transfer of seized land from the state to private entities.<sup>456</sup>

Corporate influence extends to foreign policy. According to Ashok Malik, a journalist and researcher of Indian private sector diplomacy, Indian diplomats are now trained to consider the needs of India's private sector as "a primary part of their job".<sup>457</sup> Such close public-private partnerships have raised accusations of cronyism. According to Arvind Subramanian, an economic advisor to the Indian government, "no question, there is an oligarchy developing that has an enormous amount of influence."<sup>458</sup>

Dynasticism and corruption, while deplorable, would not be strictly relevant to the discussion at hand except that they contribute in a very real way to political exclusion. Dynasticism "retards a democracy's ability to respond to its citizens' needs and people's empowerment in general," and recent studies have

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<sup>451</sup> Polgreen, "Health Officials at Risk as India's Graft Thrives".

<sup>452</sup> Burke, "Corruption in India".

<sup>453</sup> Jim Yardley and Vikas Bajaj, "Billionaires' Rise Aids India and the Favor is Returned," *New York Times*, 26 July 2011.

<sup>454</sup> Yardley and Bajaj, "Billionaires' Rise Aids India and the Favor is Returned".

<sup>455</sup> Yardley and Bajaj, "Billionaires' Rise Aids India and the Favor is Returned".

<sup>456</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 580.

<sup>457</sup> Jim Yardley, "Industry in India Helps Open a Door to the World," *New York Times*, 31 March 2012.

<sup>458</sup> Yardley and Bajaj, "Billionaires' Rise Aids India".

demonstrated a correlation between dynastic politics, poverty and income inequality.<sup>459</sup> It also discourages participation in the political process. In the words of Dr. Ashok Acharya of the University of Delhi,

[India has] patronage politics due to a lack of democracy at the grassroots level, where people cannot rise through the ranks...the common man does not want to enter the fray due to the complexity of the system. The system disincentivizes the new comers into politics.<sup>460</sup>

Corruption also contributes to the political exclusion of economically and socially vulnerable groups. By crippling Parliament and interfering with the capacity of the bureaucracy to deliver vital services, corruption fosters a sense that citizens cannot expect assistance or redress from the legitimate political process. As Jaswant Singh has argued,

At the heart of any functioning democratic order must be a firm regard for the rule of law. When this is absent, political and economic troubles fill the void. That is India's situation today, as many high officials display willful disregard for the letter of the law and flaunt their defiance of its spirit. Their corruption is debilitating not only India's parliament, but its democracy as well.<sup>461</sup>

He goes on to argue that "what remains of representative institutions is an empty shell of residual decision-making, with bribery being the only real conversation of government."<sup>462</sup> In this political climate, when the very institutions of democracy and the political process itself are both ineffective and highly suspect, it is not at all surprising that some might reject Indian democracy entirely.

While dynasticism and corruption, and the alienation they create, exclude large swathes of the Indian public from the political process, they are perhaps not the most significant factor promoting political exclusion in India today. Rather, it is the remarkable level of political violence in India that may be most responsible for the political exclusion that drives Maoist support, especially among vulnerable groups including dalits and adivasis.

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<sup>459</sup> Rupa Subramanya, "Economics Journal: The Price of Political Dynasties." *The Wall Street Journal*, 21 March 2012.

<sup>460</sup> Khalid, "Dynastic Politics Holds Sway in India."

<sup>461</sup> Singh, "India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?"

<sup>462</sup> Singh, "India: A corrupt dynasty or democracy?"

The Indian government has a long history of violent political repression. As early as the 1950s, communists were placed under preventive detention.<sup>463</sup> During the notorious state of emergency between June 1975 and March 1977, India's many communist parties were banned, their members were arrested, and radicals were "hunted like mad dogs".<sup>464</sup> India's "authoritarian tendency" is often said to have reached its pinnacle during The Emergency. But since then, the state's means of coercion have grown dramatically in terms of overall manpower, special units, and emergency powers. By 1980, the number of police officers in India had doubled to almost one million. By 1986, the Indian armed forces had grown to over 1.2 million members and regularly consumed 20% of government funds.<sup>465</sup> Only with a willful blindness could one fail to see how highly militarized and India has become, or how widespread state violence has become in the post-Cold War period.

The exclusion of outsiders from the political process is first enforced by a number of draconian, anti-democratic laws that punish dissent with violence and threats of violence. The Prevention of Terrorism Act, passed in 2002, has made evidence collected through torture admissible in court and has been used to arrest and threaten peaceful protestors. In Jharkhand alone, it has been used to indict over 3000 people (mostly adivasis) under suspicion of being Maoist supporters. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, in force in many north-eastern states, allows army officers to use lethal force against anyone suspected of disturbing public order.<sup>466</sup>

In Chhattisgarh, the Special Public Security Act allows police to hold individuals without bail for several years, including activists who were imprisoned for mailing evidence of police and army atrocities to Members of Parliament.<sup>467</sup> The Act was also used to imprison Binayak Sen, a celebrated doctor, human-rights activist and official of the People's Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL). A vocal critic of Chhattisgarh's counter-insurgency strategies, Sen was detained for over a

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<sup>463</sup> Robb, *A History of India*, 223.

<sup>464</sup> Rahul Pandita, "The Phantom Who Fell," *Open Magazine*, 3 December 2011.

<sup>465</sup> Robb, *A History of India*, 223.

<sup>466</sup> Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, 28-29.

<sup>467</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

year without trial for allegedly passing on letters from an imprisoned Maoist whom he treated in jail. The Act has also been used to detain journalists, cloth merchants (for providing Maoists with camouflage uniforms) and doctors (for providing Maoists with prescriptions).<sup>468</sup> As *The Economist* noted regarding Sen's case, "the state does not really need to convict...The authorities have shown all too clearly that they can punish people under their 'special law' without having to prove their case in court."<sup>469</sup> In practice, these laws target vulnerable groups including dalits, adivasis and the political left.<sup>470</sup>

The Indian state also enforces political exclusion by passively allowing the political left and other vulnerable groups to be targeted for violence. Civil activists, including activists engaged in relatively benign work such as scrutinizing government and corporate corruption, have been targeted. Controversy surrounding the Right to Information Act is illustrative. Since its adoption in 2006, civil activists have tried to use the Act to disclose information concerning corruption and collusion between politicians and large corporations. However, many have been beaten, harassed and, in at least a *dozen* reported cases, murdered. In such cases, the police often fail to investigate.<sup>471</sup> Activists organizing against mining and other industrial development projects are also targeted. For example, Sister Valsa John, a Catholic nun who (peacefully) organized Santhal adivasis against open-cast coal mining in Jharkhand state, was killed in 2011 when a large group of men entered her home and butchered her with axes. Prior to her death, Sister Valsa claimed that mine agents had threatened her, and the men investigated for her killing held contracts with Panem Coal Mines. Still, police initially blamed both Maoists and adivasis for the murder.<sup>472</sup> Speaking about the recent murder of an activist in Gujarat who exposed a local politician's ties to illegal mining, the

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<sup>468</sup> "Sentence First, Verdict Afterwards", *The Economist* 29 May 2008.  
<http://www.economist.com/node/11465526>.

<sup>469</sup> "Sentence First, Verdict Afterwards", *The Economist*.

<sup>470</sup> See e.g. Roy, "Walking with the Comrades"; Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*.

<sup>471</sup> Lydia Polgreen, "High Price for India's Information Law." *New York Times*, 22 January 2011.

The Right to Information Act allows citizens to demand information from the government and has been used to great success in stopping petty corruption at the local level, allowing individuals to, for example, obtain food subsidies or pensions without having to pay a bribe.

<sup>472</sup> *101 East* "India's Coal Rush", *Al Jazeera English*, 26 March 2012; "Murdered India activist Sister Valsa John 'was threatened'" *BBC News* [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) 17 November 2011.

prominent human rights lawyer Anand Yagnik argued that, "the message has gone out that if you resort to your right to information to try to harass a political person, even after your murder, that man will go scot-free."<sup>473</sup>

This impunity extends to the treatment of other vulnerable groups, especially dalits. Dalits are often violently attacked by members of upper castes, including feudal landlords, as a form of collective punishment intended to discourage dissent. Reportedly, dalits were victimized in more than 115 000 "atrocities" between 2008 and 2010, with the number of incidents rising over 10% in 2009. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, dalit women in particular are targeted by sexual violence, "from state actors and dominant castes who employ these methods *to inflict political lessons and crush dissent* within the [dalit] community." [emphasis mine] Local police and politicians, of all parties, often fail to investigate these crimes or to charge the perpetrators, and instead intimidate the victims.<sup>474</sup>

The Indian state is not only complicit in ensuring that caste violence goes unreported and unpunished. Rather, police, politicians and other state actors are often agents of violence themselves. Police frequently target dalits for arbitrary arrest, torture and extrajudicial killing.<sup>475</sup> Mass protests by the dalit community, such as a series of *bandhs*<sup>476</sup> held in Maharashtra in 2006, are often quashed by police with *lathi* (baton) charges, curfews and widespread arrests, often resulting in civilian deaths.<sup>477</sup> The failure of the democratic state to address dalit interests – indeed, the state's participation in their oppression – has led many dalits to join the Maoists. One anecdote told by dalit caste Muslims in the documentary *India Untouched: Stories of a People Apart*, is illustrative:

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<sup>473</sup> Polgreen, "High Price for India's Information Law".

<sup>474</sup> Working Group on Human Rights, *India Status Report*, 115-118; Stalin K., "India Untouched: Stories of a People Apart," *Cultureunplugged.com* 2007. [www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/5752/India-Untouched---Stories-of-a-People-Apart](http://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/5752/India-Untouched---Stories-of-a-People-Apart).

<sup>475</sup> Working Group on Human Rights, *India Status Report*, 115-118; Stalin K. "India Untouched".

<sup>476</sup> A *bandh* is a protest in which a political party or a community declares a general strike. A *bandh* may be called for an individual municipality or state, or nationwide (called a *bharat bandh*). During a *bandh*, the general public is expected to remain at home and not report to work, shopkeepers are expected to close their shops, and public transport operators of buses and cabs are expected to stay off the road.

<sup>477</sup> "Resolution on the Killings of Dalits in Khairlanji," CPI(Maoist): 9<sup>th</sup> Congress.



Pandra village in Lohardagga district has about a hundred families of the Pamadiya caste [Muslim dalit caste]. During one Namaz they were beaten black and blue for praying in the front lines. This led to violent clashes and in the end the Pamadiyas joined the Maoists. How long could they go on fighting? ...they have to take help from the Communists to offer Namaz.<sup>478</sup>

In this way, relentless caste discrimination and violence have directly benefited Maoists' recruitment efforts.

State violence is especially common – almost ubiquitous – in the execution of land seizures. Adivasis are especially vulnerable. They are frequently harassed by the Forest Department and targeted by “scorched village” campaigns intended to drive them away from their ancestral forests.<sup>479</sup> Villages that try to resist land seizures attract extremely violent responses from the state. For example, when Tata Group signed a MoU in 2004 with Orissa state for 2 000 acres in Kalinganagar and delayed compensation for displaced families, the residents refused to leave their land in protest. Company bulldozers, protected by a cadre of 300 police officers, began leveling the residents' homes. An altercation ensued which left a dozen villagers dead and dozens more injured. In another incident, local farmers and fishermen protested the building of a steel plant in Jagatsinghpur which would cover 4 000 acres of land, affect 11 villages and displace or otherwise impact 22 000 people. Protesters were attacked by both company security and 18 battalions of state police wielding improvised bombs.<sup>480</sup> In the case of Rajarhat New Town in Culcutta, West Bengal, farmers who protested the land seizures were harassed and intimidated by the notorious *harmad bahini* which, according to activists, “issued threats, assaulted people and even murdered some. The police acted as their auxiliary force.”<sup>481</sup>

In numerous other incidents, police have razed makeshift camps, and fired tear gas and live ammunition at women and children. Police have also been accused of various atrocities, including gang rapes and post-mortem mutilations.<sup>482</sup> In March 2007, the government of West Bengal ran afoul of farmers and villagers

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<sup>478</sup> Stalin K. “India Untouched”.

<sup>479</sup> Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, 28-29.

<sup>480</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 583-590.

<sup>481</sup> Mazumdar, “India’s Worst Land Grab.”

<sup>482</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 583-590.

in Nandigram when it attempted to seize land for the establishment of a SEZ. The residents refused to leave, barricading their villages and sabotaging roads and bridges. Fourteen villagers were killed when police stormed the barricades, and the government was forced to suspend the project. The incident was one of the worst non-sectarian massacres in recent times and has since become known as “the Nandigram violence”. It serves as a powerful illustration of “why violent resistance has become an attractive option for those with no political voice.”<sup>483</sup>

It increasingly appears that the most vulnerable groups in India, including the poor, dalits, adivasis and marginal farmers, are indeed voiceless. Land seizures are illustrative of how effectively these groups have been excluded from the political process. Land seizures have become an explosive political issue throughout India and have provoked vigorous public protest. Important civil society organizations like The National Alliance of Peoples' Movements have coordinated broad resistance campaigns, including a nation-wide month-long protest against the SEZ Act in 2007.<sup>484</sup> The SEZ Act was also condemned by no less a national figure than Sonia Gandhi who, alongside other national ministers, declared that farmland should never be seized for SEZs. However, grassroots protests, including hunger strikes and demonstrations numbering in the hundreds of thousands, have proved fruitless. One such demonstration in September 2006, at which 35, 000 farmers protested, resulted in no redress whatsoever.<sup>485</sup> Land seizures have proceeded apace in the face of overwhelming public opposition.

Indian democracy has been hollowed-out to such an extent, and the space for political dissent has shrunk so dramatically, that democratic, non-violent means of protest have proven completely ineffective.<sup>486</sup> What *has* proved effective is the threat of Naxal-style retaliation. In 2008, when the government of West Bengal tried to seize 1000 acres outside Calcutta for the construction of a Tata Motors plant, a local activist and politician, Mamata Banerjee, threatened violence.<sup>487</sup> The state government was forced to make concessions to the aggrieved farmers and

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<sup>483</sup> Thornton, “India in Search of Itself”, 192-193.

<sup>484</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 583-590.

<sup>485</sup> Thornton, “India in Search of Itself”, 194-195.

<sup>486</sup> Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, 37.

<sup>487</sup> Thornton, “India in Search of Itself”, 194-195.

Tata dismantled its plant.<sup>488</sup> Maoist guerrillas, and the movement's above-ground organizations, are reported to be actively mobilizing farmers against land seizures. They have mobilized peasants to occupy surplus land and have mounted militant campaigns.<sup>489</sup> For many years, aluminum companies avoided the bauxite mining areas of Andhra Pradesh because of the risks. Naxalite groups also threatened mining projects in Jharkhand where Tata Steel and other companies had planned to build multi-billion dollar plants.<sup>490</sup> These land seizures, and the Maoists' seemingly singular success in derailing them, have fuelled the Maoist insurgency perhaps more than any other single factor.

However, it is in the counter-insurgency war against the Maoists that the extreme – and counter-productive – nature of state violence in India is most on display. Delhi denies that the counter-insurgency campaign, called Operation Green Hunt, is a “war”, although it certainly looks like one. Between 300 000 and 400 000 paramilitary forces have been deployed in Maoist-affected areas across ten states, and Delhi has allocated over Rs. 1 trillion for internal security. Although the Indian army has not yet directly participated in operations against the Maoists, the North, Central, South, West and Eastern commands of the Indian army have all formed special units to offer advice, training, intelligence and technology to state police departments. In the opinion of the Maoist command, it is the Indian army that “formulated the strategy for the war”.<sup>491</sup>

Delhi has also assisted state governments in the red corridor by providing them with armored vehicles, minesweeping equipment and imaging technology to help locate remote Maoist camps. In 2005, the Counter-Terrorism and Jungle Warfare Training School opened near Raipur and has since trained thousands of local police to “fight a guerilla like a guerilla.”<sup>492</sup> Twenty similar schools are being planned across India. High-ranking Indian police officers are reportedly being trained in the techniques of “targeted assassination” by no less than Israel's

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<sup>488</sup> Sumit Ganguly, “Domestic Turmoil and External Hopes: India in 2008.” *Asian Survey* 49 (2009): 42.

<sup>489</sup> Walker, “Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India”, 583.

<sup>490</sup> “The East is Red,” *Economist*.

<sup>491</sup> Rahul Pandita, “No Atmosphere for Talks”, *Open Magazine* 13 November 2010.

[www.openthemagazine.com/article/nation/no-atmosphere-for-talks](http://www.openthemagazine.com/article/nation/no-atmosphere-for-talks).

<sup>492</sup> “A Spectre Haunting India,” *The Economist*.

Mossad.<sup>493</sup> Israel is also reported to be supplying India with laser range-finders, thermal imaging equipment and unmanned drones.<sup>494</sup> Only when the government turned to aerial assaults did the Supreme Court finally intervene, ruling that the state could not use such overwhelming, indiscriminate force against its own citizens.<sup>495</sup>

In the war against the Maoists, the line between police and military has become blurred. One of the clearest indications of this fading distinction, and one of the state's most dangerous weapons, is the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). CRPF is best known for its operations in Indian-occupied Kashmir, but has also been tasked with fighting the Maoists. CRPF officers are armed with sub-machine guns but often wear plain clothes. They have been accused of various abuses, including razing homes and villages, and "disappearing" villagers.<sup>496</sup> Police have also been known to use torture as an interrogation technique, including on children.<sup>497</sup>

States also make use of "Special Police Officers" (SPOs), tribal villagers employed as *ad hoc* police officers. SPOs are usually young men between the ages of 18 and 25, very poorly trained, who receive a stipend of 3 000 rupees per month for their participation in police actions in "Maoist-infested" areas.<sup>498</sup> They are particularly associated with human rights violations, including sexual assaults and civilian deaths. As of 2011, there were about 40 000 SPOs in use across India.<sup>499</sup> (The Supreme Court recently ruled that Chhattisgarh must stop using SPOs in its operations. SPOs will have to be disarmed and disbanded although the state has no rehabilitation policy. Observers note that this will likely leave them at the mercy of the Maoists.)<sup>500</sup>

In Chhattisgarh, a second paramilitary force, the *Salwa Judum*, has also taken up the fight against the Maoists. *Salwa Judum*, which means "the purification

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<sup>493</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>494</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>495</sup> Garda, "Inside India's Red Corridor".

<sup>496</sup> Garda, "Inside India's Red Corridor".

<sup>497</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>498</sup> "Q&A," *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>499</sup> "Q&A," *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>500</sup> "Q&A," *The Wall Street Journal*.

hunt”, is a citizens’ militia recruited from among adivasis. It was established and funded by the Chhattisgarh government in conjunction with local businesses, especially those involved in iron ore extraction.<sup>501</sup> (It is said to be pure coincidence that Salwa Judum was established one day after Chhattisgarh signed a MoU with the Tata Group.)<sup>502</sup> Salwa Judum quickly (and obviously) became a paramilitary arm of government authority. Some 5 000 of its members were commissioned as SPOs and offered training and firearms by the state.<sup>503</sup>

Salwa Judum drove adivasi villagers out of the forests using a "scorched village" policy designed to starve the Maoists of local support.<sup>504</sup> The survivors were either enticed with monetary rewards or forcibly herded into dozens of makeshift refugee camps guarded by police and military battalions. There, the government had established "food-for-work" schemes, in effect turning the camp residents into a free source of labour. Through this process, not only did the government foster fratricidal conflict amongst the adivasi, but also managed to remove large populations from the land, freeing it up for enclosure and sale.<sup>505</sup>

Salwa Judum and the refugee camps it operates are controversial. Then leader of the opposition in Chhattisgarh, Mahendra Karma of the Congress party, is one of its most ardent supporters. He stresses the movement's supposedly spontaneous, peaceful origins, while linking its work to America’s broader War on Terror. In reality, however, Salwa Judum members have been widely accused of intimidation, rape and murder in the course of their work, and families refusing to join "combing operations" (the pillaging and razing of villages) have been extorted and assaulted.<sup>506</sup> Some estimates place the number of Salwa Judum victims in the thousands. A 2006 report compiled by a number of civil liberties groups concluded that Salwa Judum has served only to escalate violence, and claim that, "Salwa

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<sup>501</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 171.

<sup>502</sup> Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, 155.

<sup>503</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

<sup>504</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

<sup>505</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 593-594.

<sup>506</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

Judum and the paramilitary operate with complete impunity. The rule of law has completely broken down."<sup>507</sup>

The severity of state violence in India suggests that the goal is not just to impose neo-liberal reforms, but perhaps to also eradicate those who have no place in the new neo-liberal economy (or who are unfortunate enough to have oil, coal or bauxite sitting beneath their forests and farmland). Binayak Sen, an advocate of adivasi rights who was incarcerated for two years on charges of sedition, equates the counter-insurgency war to genocide:

These focused processes of expropriation are forcing these people who are already living on the brink of starvation off the land and into more severe poverty. And I would submit that the condition that is being created today in large sections of the population, particularly those living in the forest areas that are mineral rich...correspond to a genocidal situation.<sup>508</sup>

Indeed, the language of genocide is frequently invoked when discussing Maoists. Indian states and districts with a high Maoist presence are said to be "Maoist infested".<sup>509</sup> Chhattisgarh state calls the counter-insurgency war a "sanitization campaign", and the state-backed citizens' militia "the purity hunt."<sup>510</sup> This approach has trickled down to the personnel who fight the counter-insurgency war on the ground. Nalin Prabhat, the feared superintendent of police in Warangal, who is, in many ways, the face of Indian democracy in his district, said of the Maoists, "...the ones who don't want to surrender will be surgically excised, like unhealthy tissue. I sleep easily at night...The human rightists don't realize we are dealing with beasts."<sup>511</sup>

The irony of this situation, and the main point here, is that this extreme state violence is directly and significantly responsible for the recruiting and operational success of the Maoists in recent years. In November 2000, the creation of Jharkhand state and subsequent counter-insurgency operations launched by the new state administration pushed the People's War Group and the Maoist Communist Centre into closer cooperation. In November 2002, a joint statement issued by both

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<sup>507</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

<sup>508</sup> Garda, "Inside India's Red Corridor".

<sup>509</sup> "Q&A: The Future of India's Maoist Movement," *The Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>510</sup> Walker, "Neoliberalism on the Ground in Rural India", 593-594.

<sup>511</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 169-170.

groups in Patna, Bihar, cited Jharkhand's indiscriminate use of the Prevention of Terrorism Act against Maoist cadres and supporters for having "compelled them to iron out differences."<sup>512</sup> Growing cooperation between the two groups quickly led to a very successful merger in 2004, which improved their "firepower, 'battle ability' and levels of modernization", significantly bolstering their operational capacity.<sup>513</sup>

State violence also directly facilitated the Maoists' improved recruiting success. The Maoist cadre's growth since the competing factions were forced to merge has been significant and unprecedented: from about 7, 000 to over an estimated 60, 000 guerrillas and supporters.<sup>514</sup> On a more personal level, many Maoists recount joining the movement after witnessing theft, arson, gang-rapes, murders and mutilations during police and army assaults on their villages. This is particularly the case for female recruits.<sup>515</sup>

While the Maoists take special pains to reach out to women by tackling gender violence and discrimination, the most significant factor in female recruitment seems to be the extreme state violence of the counter-insurgency war. Women living in Maoist-affected areas are particularly vulnerable to violence meted out by state security forces. In the red corridor, a bob-cut hairstyle is often taken as evidence that a woman is a Maoist and is enough to warrant arrest or execution. KAMS<sup>516</sup> especially, has drawn the ire of police for exposing corruption and, as a result, its members are frequently targeted for rape and sexual mutilation during police raids and Salwa Judum hunts.<sup>517</sup> Women who accuse security personnel of rape or other violence are often branded as "extremists" or "insurgents", and are threatened, abducted, arrested or killed.<sup>518</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that women in the red corridor turn to the Maoists for protection and for power. As one (entirely unsympathetic) police superintendent explained it,

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<sup>512</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>513</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>514</sup> "Communist Party of India-Maoist," *South Asia Terrorism Portal*.

<sup>515</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>516</sup> *Krantikari Adivasi Mahila Sangathan*, the Maoists' civil society organization for women.

<sup>517</sup> Roy, "Walking with the Comrades".

<sup>518</sup> Krishnan, "Women Struggling Against Rape in India."

They think it's romantic to be a revolutionary. *For the women, it means they no longer get treated like a sexual commodity.* If you go into a village with a gun, even the rich landlords have to kiss your feet.”<sup>519</sup>[emphasis mine]

Many Maoists do indeed cite violent police and army assaults on their villages as their motivation for joining the movement.<sup>520</sup> All this helps to account for the extraordinarily high number of women recruited into the party, and demonstrates how increased state violence has helped propel the Maoists' recent growth.

The so-called “siege of Lalgah” is an excellent illustration of how a backdrop of poverty, combined with state violence, has generated support for the Maoists. The Lalgah region of West Bengal is deeply impoverished and its local government is plagued by corruption. Most villages lack electricity and a Rs2 bag of rice is unaffordable for many residents. Ration cards are made available only to politicians' friends and relatives. Politicians reportedly interfere in local elections and arrest villagers who refuse to nominate or support them. Lalgah is, in short, a case study in all that is flawed about Indian democracy.<sup>521</sup>

Maoists quietly campaigned in Lalgah for some years. They offered free food and medicine to residents, and attended village meetings where they spoke about economic exploitation and government corruption. By 2008, Lalgah had become a Maoist stronghold. In November of that year, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee narrowly survived a landmine planted by Maoists. The police action that followed – characterized by police brutality, torture and vandalism – sparked the Lalgah resistance. In the subsequent “siege”, the Maoists encouraged villagers to fight police with whatever crude weapons they possessed and sought their help in transporting weapons and supplies. When Cobra Special Forces were brought to the area to hunt for the agitators, the Maoists melted into the forest, leaving ghost villages in their wake. Ironically, the lack of development in the region hampered the government's response. In the absence of access to potable water, police suffered from mass dehydration and some officers

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<sup>519</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 170.

<sup>520</sup> Roy, “Walking with the Comrades”.

<sup>521</sup> Rahul Pandita, “Once Upon a Place,” *Open Magazine*, 27 June 2009.



died of heat stroke.<sup>522</sup> Nevertheless, during the siege of Lalgarh the government struck a blow against the Maoists when the charismatic leader, Kishenji, was shot six times and killed.<sup>523</sup>

#### 4.6 The Absent State

The Maoists insurgency is often held responsible for the very poverty, insecurity and underdevelopment that drive its growth. The Indian government blames the Maoists for stalling development efforts in India's poorest states by, for example, interfering with road construction.<sup>524</sup> India's \$40 billion road-building program has indeed been disrupted by attacks and threats against contractors, especially in Bihar.<sup>525</sup> Maoists also threatened mining projects in Jharkhand where India's Tata Steel, as well as foreign companies, planned to build multi-billion dollar plants. For many years, aluminum companies avoided the bauxite mining areas of Andhra Pradesh because of the risks associated with the counter-insurgency war.<sup>526</sup>

But, while the Naxalite-Maoist movement is treated as a *source* of India's development failures, it is more a *symptom* of India's development failures. In *The Absent State: Insurgency as an Excuse for Misgovernance*, two journalists who have covered the Maoist movement, Neelesh Misra and Rahul Pandita, argue just

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<sup>522</sup> Pandita, "Once Upon a Place."

<sup>523</sup> Pandita, "The Phantom Who Fell". Kishenji was born Mallojula Koteswara Rao in 1954 in the Karimnagar district of Andhra Pradesh (this district has produced many of the Maoists' top leaders, including Ganapathy). His father was a member of the Congress Socialist Party and he participated in the Telangana uprising at the age of 14. He went on to earn a degree in mathematics, and later studied law in Hyderabad. In the early 1970s he met Seetharamaiah and Ganapathi, and established the Radical Students' Union in 1974. After The Emergency, he participated in the party's Go to the Village campaign in 1978 and the historic Jagtial March that same year. He first worked in Andhra Pradesh before moving to Bastar in the mid-1980s, becoming Ganapathy's trusted lieutenant. He was one of the first Maoists to allegedly receive training from Sri Lanka's LTTE ("Tamil Tigers"). In 1993, he became a member of the Central Committee and was given command of the Eastern and Northern zones. In 1995 he moved to West Bengal. He played a significant role in the 2004 merger and, in recent years, tried to establish links with northeast insurgent groups in an effort to establish bases in upper Assam. In his final years he worked among adivasis in Lalgarh. He was killed by security forces in November 2011. He is survived by his wife and fellow commander, Maina, Secretary of the Dandakaranya Special Zone Committee.

<sup>524</sup> "A Spectre Haunting India," *The Economist*.

<sup>525</sup> "The East is Red," *Economist*.

<sup>526</sup> "The East is Red," *Economist*.

that.<sup>527</sup> They chronicle how unemployment, starvation, a lack of education and healthcare facilities, and widespread misappropriation of development funds has fuelled the Maoists in tribal and remote areas. They also examine how a lack of security and justice has fuelled vigilantism. They conclude that the Maoist movement and other secessionist movements across India are the result of an “absent state”.<sup>528</sup> However, as some critics have noted<sup>529</sup>, and as we have already seen, an “absent state” (used here to describe an insufficient government response to widespread suffering) is not enough to explain the dramatic growth of an armed group like the Maoists. After all, desperate economic circumstances and inadequate government services are common across India and throughout the wider region. Rather, it is the role of the state as a violent enforcer of neo-liberal reforms that has generated the Maoists’ recent and dramatic growth.

#### **4.7 Conclusions and Prospects for the Future**

Anti-democratic laws and extreme violence directed against civil society by the state have excluded from the political process those marginalized groups that form the majority of Maoist supporters and cadres. And by violently enforcing neo-liberal reforms, the Indian government has made itself more their enemy than ally. Speaking specifically of adivasi villagers, Rahul Pandita argues,

You go to the huts and there is nothing. They have a lot of malnutrition...They get mistreated by forest officers, who take their goats and their chickens and try to take their wives too. In the old days the Adivasis could get a monkey or snake from the forest and drink water from a river. Now they find – because of all the mining and industrial processing – that the water is contaminated with fluoride and arsenic. The Maoists have set up schools in some places which have a mix of education and propaganda. They even show BBC science programmes. If you ask the Adivasis who they support, they say, ‘The police come here and beat us. The Maoists come and demand food, and then go on their way.’ You could call them sympathizers.”<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Neelesh Misra and Rahul Pandita, *The Absent State: Insurgency as an Excuse for Misgovernance* (Gurgaon: Hachette, 2010).

<sup>528</sup> Misra and Pandita, *The Absent State*.

<sup>529</sup> J. Sri Raman, “Insurgencies and the Indian State,” *The Hindu.com* 9 November 2010.

<sup>530</sup> French, *India: A Portrait*, 166-167.

A lack of genuine democracy in India, that is, the political exclusion of marginalized groups through violent means, in combination with the savage impacts of neo-liberal reforms on the lowest strata of Indian society, is responsible for the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency's success in the post-Cold War era. Sorely pressed by an untenable economic reality, and without legitimate means of participating in their own governance, affected communities turned to the only other available option: armed struggle.

The Indian Government has long been eager to proclaim the Maoists' imminent demise. However, today's CPI-Maoist insurgency is simply the most recent manifestation of a conflict that has raged for decades. From the Tebhaga uprisings in northern Bengal in 1946, to the Telangana rebellion in Andhra in the late 1940s, to the uprising at Naxalbari in 1967, whenever it appeared that the rebels were not only defeated but physically exterminated, they re-emerged more organized, determined and influential than they were before. So it is today. Far from declining, the Maoists have only grown in strength and numbers in the face of the government's increasingly vicious counter-insurgency campaign.

The Maoists have suffered from the recent deaths of several high-ranking, high-profile members. Amongst them was Kishengi, "number 3" in the Maoist hierarchy and an expert military strategist; he was also a popular leader whom the media had transformed into a near-mythical figure. Other senior leaders have also been killed, including Cherukurl Rajkumar alias Azad and Patel Sudhakar Reddy alias Surya, while others including Pramod Mishra and Varanasi Subramaniam have been arrested. These killings are part of a deliberate government strategy to decimate the top leadership of the movement, but it is not likely to prove as effective as the government might wish.<sup>531</sup> According to one observer:

The Government hopes the insurgency will die down if the top leadership is erased. But it won't be so easy. Over the past few years, Maoists have suffered some big losses. But there are still senior leaders around who can hold the Maoist cadre together. That apart, leaders like Kishenji have, over the years, nurtured and trained a second line of leaders; Orissa-based Sabyasachi Panda is one such Maoist commander.<sup>532</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Pandita, "The Phantom who Fell.

<sup>532</sup> Pandita, "The Phantom who Fell.

Moreover, as the counter-insurgency war against the Maoists has transformed into a genocide conducted against adivasis, the fight is likely to continue with ever more resolve. The celebrated Indian writer, Arundhati Roy, eloquently said as much when she argued:

People who have taken to arms have done it with the full knowledge of what the consequences of that decision will be. They have done so knowing that they are on their own. They know that the new laws of the land criminalize the poor and conflate resistance with terrorism. They know that appeals to conscience, liberal morality, and sympathetic press coverage will not help them now. They know no international marches, no globalized dissent, no famous writers will be around when the bullets fly. Hundreds of thousands have broken faith with the institutions of India's democracy. Large swathes of the country have fallen out of the government's control...The battle stinks of death. It's by no means pretty. How can it be when the helmsman of the army of Constraining Ghosts is the ghost of Chairman Mao himself? ...Are they Idealists fighting for a Better World? Well, anything is better than annihilation.<sup>533</sup>

India's recent general elections, in which Congress suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of BJP, offers little prospect for change. The ascension of relative outsider Narendra Modi – who famously sold tea at railway stations as a boy – to the office of Prime Minister, was hailed worldwide as game changing, and as a mandate “to sweep away the cobwebs of bureaucratic and political lethargy and unleash India's creative energies.”<sup>534</sup>

Modi has, both accurately and ominously, been called “India's Margaret Thatcher”.<sup>535</sup> As Chief Minister of Gujarat, he granted soft loans and reduced-cost land to private investors, but lagged behind other Indian states in tackling poverty, illiteracy and infant mortality.<sup>536</sup> As Prime Minister, Modi promises to tackle India's “bloated” state sector and undertake massive state and private sector

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<sup>533</sup> Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*, 159.

<sup>534</sup> Swapan Dasgupta, “India Has Given Narendra Modi a Mandate to Refashion the Country” *The Guardian* 21 May 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/21/india-modi-mandate-refashion-country>. See also Aditya Chakraborty, “Narendra Modi: Is a High-Tech Populist the Best India Can Hope For?” *The Guardian*, 19 May 2014 [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/19/narendra-modi-populist-india-revolutionary-values-constitution](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/19/narendra-modi-populist-india-revolutionary-values-constitution).

<sup>535</sup> Dasgupta, “India Has Given Narendra Modi a Mandate to Refashion the Country”.

<sup>536</sup> Chakraborty, “Narendra Modi: Is a High-Tech Populist the Best India Can Hope For?”

investments to promote economic growth.<sup>537</sup> BJP is set to continue, if not speed up, neo-liberal reforms and land acquisitions. The party's election manifesto expressly promises to craft environmental laws "that will lead to speedy clearance of projects without delay."<sup>538</sup> And, like Congress, BJP state governments have a remarkably poor record in protecting the lands and rights of adivasis,<sup>539</sup> to say nothing of Muslims and other minority communities.<sup>540</sup>

As we have seen, the neo-liberal policies that make Modi a darling of the West are likely to exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the poverty and inequality that motivate Maoists and their supporters. And, if Modi's reputation as an autocrat with "thuggish lieutenants"<sup>541</sup> is well-deserved, then the new administration in Delhi can be expected to continue the counter-productive counter-insurgency war that so effectively swells the Maoists' ranks. Indeed, as long as it remains one of the few credible alternatives to India's failed liberal democracy, the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency will most likely continue to survive and thrive in the era of neo-liberal globalization.

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<sup>537</sup> Dasgupta, "India Has Given Narendra Modi a Mandate to Refashion the Country".

<sup>538</sup> G. Ananthapadmanabhan, "Will India's New Leaders Respect the Rights of Its Most Marginalised People?" *The Guardian* 22 May 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/may/22/india-new-leaders-respect-rights-marginalised-indigenous>.

<sup>539</sup> Ananthapadmanabhan, "Will India's New Leaders Respect the Rights of Its Most Marginalised People?"

<sup>540</sup> See e.g. Chakraborty, "Narendra Modi: Is a High-Tech Populist the Best India Can Hope For?"; Jason Burke, "Narendra Modi Sworn in as Indian PM in Spectacular Ceremony" *The Guardian* 26 May 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/26/narendra-modi-sworn-in-india-prime-minister>. BJP is a Hindu nationalist party, and embraces Hindutva as its guiding philosophy. Many Muslims, in both India and Pakistan, fear that Modi harbors sectarian prejudices. In an interview with the Ashis Nandy, Modi "painted every Muslim as a suspected traitor and a potential terrorist," and left Nandy with the impression that "I had met a textbook case of a fascist and a prospective killer". Although he has since denied any involvement, Modi presided over sectarian riots in Gujarat in 2002 that killed between 1000 and 2000 Muslims, and was even implicated in encouraging them.

<sup>541</sup> Chakraborty, "Narendra Modi: Is a High-Tech Populist the Best India Can Hope For?"

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

In 1990, Marxism became extremely unfashionable. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and collapse of the Soviet Union, with China fully committed to a program of authoritarian state capitalism, and with the welfare state floundering in the West after a decade of assaults from the right, capitalism and liberal democracy seemed very much in the ascendancy. As Jorge Castañeda noted in *Leftovers*, the neo-liberal option was “popular, successful and omnipresent.”<sup>542</sup> Further:

...the single path seemed to be the right path. Conversely, anything that smacked of economic statism, social redistribution, subsidies, and anti-globalization movements was perceived as anachronistic and mistaken, in good faith or with a hidden agenda.<sup>543</sup>

Marxists were, and remain, derided as “dinosaurs”, and their ideology and prescriptions for social reform are dismissed as “dead mantras”. Challenged by both the “clash of civilizations” theory and the “end of history” theory, Marxism indeed seemed to be a relic of another time. However, regardless of the general academic consensus, recent developments around the world suggest that the specter of Marxism has not been altogether banished.

### **5.1 Shared Traits and Factors in Recent Growth**

Despite emerging on two different continents half a world away, and in the context of dramatically different national histories and cultures, FARC and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency share common origins, qualities and aspirations. Both groups have roots in economic and political crises in the 1960s. Both have enjoyed a consistent leadership over many decades and have a rank and file membership that is young and diverse, including small farmers and rural laborers, indigenous peoples and other racial and religious minorities, displaced persons, urban intellectuals and other sectors of the urban workforce. Both groups also boast a remarkably high number of women members. They have both constructed platforms that address the concerns of small farmers and rural laborers, including

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<sup>542</sup> Castañeda, “Where Do We Go From Here?” In *Leftovers*, 231.

<sup>543</sup> Castañeda, “Where Do We Go From Here?” In *Leftovers*, 231.

calling for major land reforms, the provision of government services to needy rural areas, and greater state control over strategic natural resources. They express concerns about the impacts of industrial development, and especially of green revolution technologies, on the environment and small farming economy. They also seek to address discrimination and violence against women and against indigenous peoples and other minority communities.<sup>544</sup> Finally, both FARC and the Maoists reject participation in the electoral process, instead embracing armed struggle as the only means of achieving their political goals.

Despite wildly different academic narratives about Colombia and India, the growth of FARC and the Naxalite-Maoist Insurgency was also spurred by similar economic and political developments in the post-Cold War period. In both Colombia and India, swift and dramatic neo-liberal reforms have, despite praise from economists and accelerating GDP growth rates, led to worsening quality of life indicators and greater inequality. These reforms also reduced or eliminated the public services on which vulnerable groups relied and ultimately drove millions of families into poverty. In both countries, the use of state violence to implement these reforms, and continued or increased use of state violence to quell popular dissent, led to a shrinking space for democratic participation and a growing sense among vulnerable groups that “legitimate” mechanisms of government cannot or will not address their needs. As we have seen, these shared factors led to the growth of armed rebel groups that many believe, rightly or wrongly, are the only alternative to an ostensibly democratic regime that does not represent them.

## **5.2 Challenging the Clash of Civilizations and the End of History**

The dramatic growth of both FARC and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency challenges the clash of civilizations theory. Both these movements are culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse groups united by shared political and economic goals. While FARC began as a rural, peasant-led organization, its membership now reflects the diversity of Colombian society, and includes indigenous and Afro-Colombians, displaced peoples, union members and other sectors of the urban

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<sup>544</sup> “Agrarian Programme”, *FARC-EP Historical Outline*, 113-119; “Party Programme,” CC (P) CPI(Maoist), 21.

workforce, as well as urban intellectuals. Similarly, the Naxalite-Maoist movement has united Hindus and Muslims of all castes, including dalits, with diverse tribal populations (all of which speak different languages and belong to different religious traditions), and small farmers, sharecroppers and landless laborers across the country. But rather than being driven to sectarian conflict, as the clash of civilizations theory predicts, in both cases diverse peoples have joined movements that are officially secular, reject caste and race discrimination, and embrace linguistic and cultural differences. These movements demonstrate that instead of being beholden to monolithic religious, cultural and ethnic values identities, communities can and will overcome communal conflict for the sake of shared economic and political goals.

The dramatic growth in membership, territory and military effectiveness of both FARC and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency also challenges the “end of history” theory. Savagely exploited but otherwise unwelcome in a new economic regime, frustrated by their governments’ inability or unwillingness to address their grievances, and increasingly subjected to coercion in the form of state violence, tens of thousands of Colombians and Indians have taken up arms in Marxist rebel movements. Hundreds of thousands more, struggling with neo-liberal reforms and voiceless in the legitimate political system have turned to the guerrillas for assistance in meeting their needs and for political representation. Anachronistic and mistaken or not, FARC and the Naxalite-Maoists have kept Marxism very much newsworthy in the twentieth century. That both the Colombian and Indian governments consider these groups to be the single greatest threats to internal security, and the focus of multi-billion dollar, decades-long counter-insurgency campaigns, suggests that liberal democracy is not quite as incontrovertible, inexorable or triumphant as it is often said to be.

### **5.3    The Spectre of Marx and the Future of Liberal Democracy**

Even in the West – the democratic heartland – the triumph of liberal democracy seems to be wobbling. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis there has been a revival of interest in all things Marxist. That year, a survey by Reuters of



former East Germans revealed that over half believed the free market was “unsuitable” and 43% wanted a return to socialism.<sup>545</sup> Since 2008, sales of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse* and *The Communist Manifesto* have risen markedly.<sup>546</sup> A new “publishing industry” has produced a slew of new academic works that reexamine Marxist thought and critique capitalism. Among the more significant English-language texts are Alain Badiou’s *The Communist Hypothesis* and Slavoj Žižek’s *The Idea of Communism* and *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*.<sup>547</sup>

The enthusiasm has spread beyond academia. A “glut” of popular books, including Terry Eagleton’s *Why Marx Was Right* and Benjamin Kunkel’s *Utopia or Bust: A Guide to the Present Crisis*, has also hit bookshelves.<sup>548</sup> The revival of Marxism has also become something of a topic *du jour* among editorialists at major international papers and news outlets. What can account for this bizarre development? According to Owen Jones, author of the 2011 bestseller *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*,

Class is back in our reality because the economic crisis affects people in different ways and because the Coalition [government of the United Kingdom] mantra that ‘we’re all in this together’ is offensive and ludicrous. Its impossible to argue now as was argued in the 1990s that we’re all middle class.<sup>549</sup>

This revival of interest has been especially strong among young people. For example, the UK-based Socialist Workers Party has noticed growing membership and increased interest in their events among young Britons.<sup>550</sup>

It is peculiar that the generation that grew up in the liberal utopia, untainted by the radicalism of the 1960s and with the spectacular collapse of the Soviet Union an impossible to miss cautionary tale, should nevertheless fall under Marx’s

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<sup>545</sup> Stuart Jeffries, “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again.” *The Guardian*, 4 July 2012.

<sup>546</sup> Jeffries, “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again”.

<sup>547</sup> Alan Johnson, “The New Communism: Resurrecting the Utopian Delusion.” *World Affairs Journal* May/June 2012. [w.worldaffairsjournal.org](http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org).

<sup>548</sup> Jeffries, “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again”. See also Kyle Chayka, “Marx-ish: Why a New Generation of Political Thinkers Is Taking Up the Communist Philosopher” *Pacific Standard* 28 May 2014. <http://www.psmag.com/navigation/business-economics/marx-ish-new-generation-political-thinkers-taking-communist-philosopher-82368/>.

<sup>549</sup> Jeffries, “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again”.

<sup>550</sup> Jeffries, “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again”.

spell. In “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again”, Stuart Jeffries puts it down to just that: young people do not remember the Soviet Union. For them,

[Marxism] is untainted by association with Stalinist gulags. For younger people too, Francis Fukuyama’s triumphalism in his 1992 book *The End of History* – in which capitalism seemed incontrovertible, its overthrow impossible to imagine – exercises less of a choke-hold on their imaginations than it does on those of their elders.<sup>551</sup>

Of course, this improbable turn of events has been met with a certain amount of disbelief, dismay and hysterical hand wringing in ivory towers. Writing for the journal *World Affairs*, Alan Johnson, professor of democratic theory and practice at Edge Hill University, was particularly harsh in “The New Communism: Resurrecting the Utopian Delusion”:

A specter is haunting the academy – the specter of “New Communism”. A worldview recently the source of immense suffering and misery, and responsible for more deaths than fascism and Nazism, is mounting a comeback; a new form of left-wing totalitarianism that enjoys intellectual celebrity but aspires to political power...The New Communism matters not because of its intellectual merits but because it may yet influence layers of young Europeans in the context of an exhausted social democracy, austerity and a self-loathing intellectual culture.<sup>552</sup>

Evidently, for some, the renaissance of interest in Marxism is not just folly but an apologia for the worst excesses of any tyrant who ever presumed to wear a red star on his cap.<sup>553</sup> Millions of people in Colombia and India – whether they be guerrillas or tribals, paras or SPOs – might beg to disagree. For many, Marxist-inspired movements offer protection from the tyranny and excesses of liberal democracy.

Is liberal democracy in *terminal* crisis? One would hardly think so. Still, to extend the ghoulish metaphor for which Marxism seems to have an affinity, old ghosts do appear to be rising. The renewed popular and academic interest in Marxism in the West suggests that, even in the cradle of liberal democracy, its hegemony is not quite as certain as before. Meanwhile, across the Third World, Marxist and Maoist-inspired movements have been flourishing since the end of the Cold War, and Marxist guerrilla armies continue to operate. As we have seen, it

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<sup>551</sup> Jeffries, “Why Marxism is on the Rise Again”.

<sup>552</sup> Johnson, “The New Communism”.

<sup>553</sup> Johnson, “The New Communism”.

was the excesses of liberal democratic regimes in the post-Cold War era that nurtured the revival of Marxist activism and lead to the dramatic growth of Marxist rebel armies. Indeed, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and the Naxalite-Maoist insurgency are among the most potent indications that Marxist-inspired movements across the globe may flourish precisely *because* of the triumph of liberal democracy.

Whether Marxism, Leninism, Maoism or any of their infinite hyphenated variations are dated or misguided seems increasingly irrelevant. The fact of the matter is that for tens of thousands of people, on two different continents and at opposite ends of the globe, Marxism is the only path remaining to them. Liberal democracy as it is practiced in Colombia and India is a system within which economically vulnerable groups are voiceless and permanently excluded from mechanisms of power. Worse still, liberal democracy has become an ideology of annihilation. If nothing else, Marxism, or at least those rebel armies that claim to embody its ideals, represents immediate survival. And in the long term, Marxism offers them a different future, one where they have a place in a new economy and a voice in a new system of governance. Is it any wonder that when faced with savage neo-liberal reforms and without a legitimate avenue for participating in the democratic system, affected communities have turned to armed revolution? To quote the great man himself, they have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.

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